

THE STRANGERS BANQUET



DONN BYRNE





8/8-

1st 80, at B's 2nd

15x'77



THE STRANGERS'
BANQUET



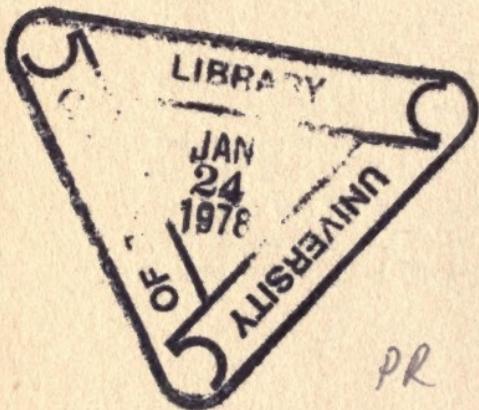
THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

By DONN BYRNE

*"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun,
and it is common among men: A man to whom
God hath given riches, wealth and honor, so that
he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he
desireth . . . but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity
and it is an evil disease." --- The words of the
Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON



PR

6003

Y43 S8

THE STRANGER'S BANQUET

Copyright, 1919, by Harper & Brothers
Printed in the United States of America
Published December, 1919

M-T

TO
SEWELL HAGGARD

THE STRANGERS'
BANQUET

“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun,
and it is common among men. A man to whom
God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that
he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth
. . . but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity and it is
an evil disease.”—*The words of the Preacher, the son
of David, King in Jerusalem.*

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

CHAPTER I

I

WITH his long white beard and with his white hair, with his hook nose and his black eyes, with his little gold ear-rings, he was, as he sat back in his chair, his stick leaning against the arm of it, the coal fire playing on his face, a picture an Italian painter might have made. It was hard to believe he was eighty-seven years old.

"I've sailed many seas in my time." His head wagged reminiscently. "North and south seas, east and west ones. From Java Island to Sandy Hook and from Boston town to San Francisco. There's no sea I haven't sailed."

His daughter, sitting near him, twenty-two years old, dark as he himself had once been, with the same Hispano-Celtic features, softened, feminine, but from the same die, could hardly believe he was her father. He seemed like some epic figure from out of a dim past. Time seemed to have stopped for him, and he might have been of any epoch, a vice-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

admiral of Noë's equally as well as the old clipper-ship master and builder, Shane Butler Keogh. He had had three wives before he married her mother. The first had been from his native Connacht, and she and her two children were dead half a century ago. The second was a Turkish woman, whom he had stolen in Jaffa, and she, too, was dead. The third was very beautiful, but the less said of her the better. It was rumored he had killed her in Marseilles. And then he had married a little Quaker lady from Philadelphia, who had thee'd him and had driven him unerringly in straight paths. It was very hard to believe him her father, with his four wives, one of them a Turkish woman; and with the little gold rings in his ears. He was more like a figure from an old story—there was something about him that suggested Solomon the King.

"Forty-six days to the Cape I took with the *Antique Lady*; seventy days to Java Head. Back again from Hongkong to London in ninety-six days. There's sailing for you, and the monsoon blowing like the Bull of Barney, and the mate all the time in the hold, a dead man."

Bran, the bigger of two wolf-hounds before the fire, rose and nuzzled his head against the old man's hand. The old man still kept his eyes in the yellow center of the fire.

"And out of Boston in the *Paul Revere*, ninety-three days to San Francisco—great time, though not the best. And a crew ready for mutiny all the time. But I handled them," he chuckled. "Oh, ay! They worked for me."

She smiled, too, for she had heard how he handled

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

them. There was no unnecessary bawling, no brutality of mates. The august presence of the old master seemed to infuse volcanic energy into the hands. They were hired to get those ships in on time or die in the attempt. An old sailor told her how her father once took on a crew of Jamaica negroes, great sailors, but untrustworthy in discipline.

"My men"—he lined them up on the poop. His voice was suave—"you are all Christians. You all love Jesus, and obey Him."

"Oh yes, sir!" they chorused.

"Good!" His voice suddenly took on the keenness and terror of a steel blade. His eyes fired up and swept them like a mitrailleuse. "Aboard this ship," he said—"aboard this ship *I* am Jesus Christ." They scuttled to their stations like scared rabbits. She was always somewhat shocked at the story, as was everybody, but all agreed it was her father, typical of him—from the life: Shane Butler Keogh.

"Isn't it time for you to be turning in, sir?" she suggested. "It's nine o'clock." He took no notice of her. Outside, the young June moon was rising, full and silvery, and was lighting up the sea from Edgartown, where they were, across to Nantucket Shoals.

She remarked the hour again, but again received no answer. There was something on his mind and he would not go to bed until it was settled. For a week now he had been acting queerly. He had decided to leave the New River house and come over to the Vineyard early. "I want the sea," he had explained, "not this muddy puddle."

His mind had been wandering a little, too. Life, which he had stretched out like a thinly drawn

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

elastic band, had snapped back suddenly at times, and he had mistaken his daughter for his sister of three-quarters of a century before. Even the Gaelic had come back to him. He would sing in queer grace notes, and in long pauses like plain chant:

"Sileann cead bean gur leo fein me nuair olaim lionn.

*Acht teidheann da thrian acu sios diom nuair smaoitim air a
gcomhradh liom,*

Sneachta seite is e gha shiorchur ar shleibhnamon fionn

*Is go bhfuil mo ghradh mar blath nan airne ar an Droighnean
Donn.*

“A hundred women think I’m theirs when I’m drinking ale, but two-thirds of them I cannot stomach when I remember their conversation with me,” he would translate for her. “Oh, the blown snow falling on the crest of Slievenamon, and my love is the Blossom of the White Thorn Tree.’ The Blossom of the White Thorn Tree,” he would tell her. “That’s your mother. God be good to her, Derith, my dear.”

For the week now he had been talking continually of his birthplace in the County of Mayo, and Derith recognized it as being the nostalgia of the sea, and the fierce longing that the night watches give in the great loneliness for the concrete spot where a man’s affections are. He seemed when he spoke of that to be back again as master trading out of Galway into Spain, or from Liverpool to the Levant, and to be always crooning for his purple Connacht hills.

*"Anois teacht an t' Samhraidh, beidh an la 'g' uil chun sineadh
Is tar eis la 'le Choluim inneosad mo sheol,
Thrid abhainn is uisce, 'sa' la is san oidhche,
Ni dheanfaidh me stad go dti Conndá Mhuigheo.*

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"A great poet wrote that—Rafftery the blind man. Now with the coming of the summer, he says, the day will be lengthening out, and after Saint Colum's day, says he, I will raise my sail. By sea and river, by night and day. I will make no stop until I come to the County of Mayo."

He was humming it again as he watched the fire. "*Anois teacht an t'Samhraidh*," he went on in his frail voice . . . "*go dti Connda Mhuigheo—go dti Connda Mhuigheo!*" He raised his eyes. "It's a fine night, Derith," he said, "a fine night, and summer's in the air . . ."

II

In all her twenty-two years, ever since she had come to the age when she could think, feel, and consciously exist, she had never felt other than that she was a part of the fine and gigantic old man who had brought her into the world. He was a comet flaring across the heavens, and she was a part of it, which would one day detach from the parent mass and become individual itself with a flaming wake.

Her mother had meant little to her, a quiet woman who did beautiful needlework. She could not think of her except as a kind and worthy body, who had tended her as an affectionate nurse might. Her brother John, weak, lovable, and insignificant, had no iron bond to draw her. All her life was centered in her father. She saw him vague as a sea-god, powerful as an Arabian djinn. He was so old he hardly seemed a father, just a romantic figure from a romantic time. He had no domestic virtues. He was never the one to drool over his family in animal

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

affection. All his life he had treated her with the deferential affection, he, the former lover of a hundred women, might have shown to any young, pretty, and worth-while girl, with this vague distinction, that she was his daughter.

He had kissed her good-by and sent her off to school. He had kissed her good-by and sent her off to college. He had come to see her there at the stated occasions. She had been intensely proud of him. Tall, broad-shouldered even at his mighty age, with his little ear-rings glittering, with his fearless, insolent black eyes, he had towered above the fathers of other girls, bankers and statesmen, obese and bald-headed, as a king might tower above a rabble of grocers. The young girls drew swift breaths of awe, the young men drew back in respect as he strode among them.

Romance and power, that was what he stood for. There was a legend that he had once jumped over the taffrail of his schooner in Biscay Bay after his hat. That was like him. She could see him in his later years, master of the great clipper boats, racing from China with silks and tea, from the Golden Gate with virgin gold, driving his men like a hurricane, outwitting the wind and tide, fearless even of the Act of God. Among the best of his day, he was—great as Waterman of the *Challenge*, and Creary of the *Flying Cloud*, great even as Mackay, who built and skippered the *Sovereign of the Seas*.

He had been great in those days, a gigantic national figure, but since then, to the girl's mind, he had been greater still. Came '57 and the later days, and the knell of the clipper was rung, and out of the hands

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of the New World passed the supremacy of shipping. But at his yards in New River old Shane Butler Keogh still built ships, small, but good in their way as any of the Belfast products and as those which slipped down the Clyde ways. And now that ship-building was coming back to its own, he was in the forefront again. . . .

It was queer how he and she coincided in so many ways. This little place on the Vineyard, strongly buttressed against wind and storm, was more to her, as it was to him, than the stately home in New River with all its modern conveniences. The living-room about them wainscoted in the fine mahogany that had come from the *Marco Polo*; the big fire of sea-coal, with its Old World crane; the two wolf-hounds, the old man's one extravagance, Bran and Sgeolan, which he had reconstructed on the Irish type at a fabulous outlay; outside in the hall, as a dinner-bell, the bell of the *Goban Saor*, the first ship the old man had commanded—all these things he loved, and she loved them, too.

And how like him, too, she was in outward physical appearance, fairly tall, as tall as a woman should be, and bigger than the average woman, and yet slim. Her father suggested a battle-charger, lean, fearless, flashing-eyed, and there was in her, too, that look of race, the look of the horse—a blooded mare, one thought of instantly, slick in the haunch, high-headed. The face was a refinement of her father's, firm-chinned, firm-nosed, black-haired, the Hispano-Celtic of Galway, with a faint duvet on the upper lip. Her father's eyes were black, but hers were gray, with violet flecks in them. Her father's mouth

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

was set firmly, but hers was mobile, expressionful. A fair, graceful edifice, one would have judged her character, with the foundation of a fortress to it. She was taking now, as the word is—bonny and taking. Later on she would be a fine woman. When she was old she would be very beautiful.

III

The little clock on the mantel had just chimed four bells—ten o'clock. The moon had risen higher in the sky with the clear, early brilliance that cut light and shadow in a well-defined chiaroscuro. Faintly, through the open window, they could see, a mile offshore, a big bark setting westward toward Nantucket Shoals, sails and staysails and jibs set to the breeze abeam.

"I mind the time," the old man was saying, "down in New York, along the river-front, when the clipper ships were lined up side by side, like horses on parade. And when they were going out they would lie at the Battery for the crew. The Whitehall boats would bring them aboard—Bill Decker's boat or Steve Roberts's, maybe. Hoist them aboard. 'Get up, damn ye!' the mate would meet them and give them a lift with the boot.

"Then the tide would begin to run ebb, and the anchor would be hove short; sails loosened fore and aft. Overhaul the gear in the tops and crosstrees. Loose the royals and skysails and leave the staysails fast. On the foretopsail yard, damn ye! and mind that gasket! Great days!

"They'd all be flutter in the gear by then, courses,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

topsails, to'ga'n's'l's, royals, and skysails. Sheet home your topsails. On the halyards there. Curse ye! Put your backs into it. The chantyman would start the tune, 'We'll kill Paddy Doyle for his boats,' or 'Whisky, Johnny.' Begad, you could hear it, 'way up Beaver Street.

"Oh, whisky killed my sister Sue,
 Whisky, Johnny,
And whisky killed the old man, too,
 Whisky for my Johnny.
Whisky's gone, what shall I do?
 Whisky, Johnny.
Oh, whisky's gone and I'll go, too,
 Whisky for my Johnny.

"Then she'd begin to pay and gather away, and over the side with the 'longshoremen and the runners. Off she belts to Java Head. Great days!"

He nodded his head several times and thumped his stick on the floor, keeping time to the chant:

"Whisky is the life of man,
 Whisky for my Johnny.
Let him drink it when he can,
 Whisky, Johnny.

"I mind them all," he went on, "the *Ann McKim*, out of Baltimore. She was the earliest of them—an opium boat in the Chinese trade. Live-oak her frames were, and copper-fastened, and she had twelve brass guns. I mind the *Oriental*, that brought the first cargo of tea from China to England, an American boat. There was nothing like her in speed or rig. I mind the *Surprise* the day she was launched. They

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

thought she would capsize, begad! but she took the water like a duck. She had a big eagle for a figurehead, and Phil Dumaresq commanded her. The bonniest ship that had ever been seen.

"I mind them all, indeed I do—the *Witch of the Wave*; the *Flying Cloud*, that made the trip to San Francisco in eighty-nine days—three hundred and seventy-four miles in one day, steering northward and westward around Cape Horn; the *Sovereign of the Seas*, with her crew of one hundred and five, four mates and two boatswains—Lauchlin Mackay, a brother of Donald's, commanded her; there was the *Great Republic*, the biggest ship that had ever been built. The *James Baines*, the *Young America*, the *Glory of the Seas*—I mind them all.

"And then steam came, and the great days were over, and the mastery passed from Boston and New York and Baltimore to Belfast and the Clyde.

"But it's coming back again, some of these days, Derith, and you'll see it right in this land. There's the steel in this country, and there's the shipwrights and the ability, and there's the blood of the old clipper men that could sail a boat through the gates of hell and back again. Oh, it's coming. We'll never see sail again. But the boats, like the White Star and the Cunard boats, will be turned out here—boats that can beat all records to blazes going from sea to sea. It's coming slowly, but it's coming sure. You'll see it; I won't. And I want you to keep the shipyards going night and day. You and your brother together. You've got the spirit and the brains, but John's a man. And you'll need a man. Will you do that? Will you promise?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

She looked straight into his eyes. "I promise, sir," she said, solemnly. A swift shadow came over her face. "But you'll see it, sir, never fear."

"I will not," he said, decidedly. "Ten years ago I thought I might. You were a very wee girl then, and your mother was alive, and one morning about this time of the year I went out early in the morning toward Oak Bluffs, and I had a dog with me, the bitch we got Bran out of. It was just about six o'clock, and I was passing down by the golf-course and the sun was coming up and the birds were singing. And a queer fancy came over me to start running, and away I went over the links like a two-year-old, leaping like a hare, supple as the dog beside me. A quarter of a mile I ran then, with hardly a breath out of me, and me seventy-seven years of age. And I thought at that time I would be like Doctor Parr in England, that lived to be nearly a hundred and fifty years old. But now I feel like a nut that's going to break open, or a ripe apple, maybe, that's going to fall from the tree."

He looked at the fire a minute or so, smiling. "*Anois teacht an t'Samhraidh,*" he began singing to himself. "Now, at the coming of the summer. . . ." The little ship's clock on the mantelpiece chimed six silvery strokes. It was eleven o'clock.

IV

She went about the house, putting everything to rights for the night—a habit she had somehow acquired, though there were even here on the Vineyard four servants to help her, a housekeeper and a

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

cook and two maids. She went into her father's bedroom to see that all was ready, the lamps lighted, the sheets turned down. Below, by the fire, still the old man was sitting, not dozing as was his custom, but wide awake, with a look of concentration on his face, and behind that somehow, as behind the soft moonlight without, there was the sense of the infinity of space. The fire still glowed heartily and on the table beside him the housekeeper had laid, on its tray, the big square glass bottle of whisky, the sliced lemon, and the sugar-bowl for his nightcap. From the crane above the coals the diminutive bronze kettle sang like a cricket.

Derith came in bustling.

"I'm going to make you your toddy and send you to bed, father," she told him. "It's after eleven."

"I'm not going to have any to-night."

"But you always have it. For twenty years—"

"But not to-night." He was emphatic. The answer somehow disquieted her, unquiet as she was already. She felt that there were in the air things she could not grasp. The dogs even were restless, though they stretched before the glow. Their eyes were open, moving to and fro in a small orbit.

She wished vaguely that John were here, but John was down in New York this week, playing in a golf-tournament with Pat Doyle, and Marston, and Alec Simpson, of Old Point. But John would be of little avail here, for all his great bulk and muscle. She smiled as she thought of him—a great baby, he always impressed people, with his round, chubby face, blue-eyed, small-nosed, whitish-haired, and his overgrown baby's body. She could visualize him

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

only as he was driving from the tee, his ball going straight and fast as a bullet down the fairway, his gigantic hulk grown suddenly graceful as a Russian dancer's body as his swing followed through, or see him cleaving through the water with his trudgeon stroke, or leaning back with the discus in his hand, as when he broke the world's record at Stockholm. No, John could not help her. Nothing had any existence for her brother that he could not feel or strangle with his monstrous, calloused paws. Anything above the average measure of intelligence in man or woman awed him. He looked on silent, helplessly. Poor John!

She went out into the garden, roaming, restless. The moon was brighter now, and it cut its shadows firmly in the little sun-dial in the rose-bed. It had been an early spring, and already the scents of summer were in the air, the scent of clover and of early roses and the tang of newly cut grass. Even in that peaceful, moonlit garden there was a sense of disquiet, of awaiting.

Well, if things were happening that she did not understand, a thing had happened which she did. Her father had intrusted to her the carrying out of his dream. All her life, as a child, as a girl, as a young woman, she had felt she was set apart for something —that there was more in her life than simple marriage, the breeding of children, the sheltered common domesticity. And suddenly as a young princess might be called from her sacrosanct pleasance to wield a scepter, she had been shown her empery. Those vast activities in New River, the great shipyards, with their high, graceful slips, with their

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

titanic derricks, with their grimy, muscled population, all those were to be hers, to govern and direct. There was John, of course. But she didn't feel that John could help, and it was on her that her father had laid the burden of the destiny. And then clearly as Moses had seen the Land of Promise from the Mount called Nebo she saw the old man's vision roll before her like an open canvas. She saw the keel laid upon the slips and stroke by stroke the graceful lines rise. The sounds of the labor rang in her ears like a droning of busy honey-bees. There was the clatter of riveting and the clang of hammers. Little by little the queer, near-human thing a ship is took shape and strength. It came down the slips to the sea in a flurry of foam, and the fearless guild of mariners took possession of her, master and navigator, mate and bo's'n, the quartermaster at the wheel, and the lookout in the bows. And it went off on a queer life of its own, addressed in a strange language, keeping its own queer time of many bells, following separate laws unknown to landsmen and upheld by ancient, inviolate traditions. And other ships followed, a mighty navy, going off on their lawful occasions, as the sonorous prayer said.

In her mind's eye she could see them, some passing westward by Nantucket Shoals, south of the Bishop's and Clerk's Light, now blinking to the north. And they would go rolling down to Rio for coffee; eastward to China for spices, silks, and tea. They would enter the ancient gates of Herakles down to the tobacco-scented Levant and penetrate north again to the Black Sea, where the oil and emerald shores are. They would go anywhere, dare everything, on an

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

adventure of commerce as epic in its way as the journey of the Argonauts of old, or as the setting out of Philip's Armada, or as the voyage of the Spanish captains to the countries of gold. . .

Then unrolled before her eyes another vista, as though she had come to a mountain-top at the farther end of her vision and another landscape lay before her—the broader, esoteric, ultimate object of her father's dream. He had always instilled into her a fierce love of his adopted country. She could almost hear his voice speaking of it, in the terms of idealism that is the birthright of the Gael.

"There is always something westward," he would philosophize. "Everything comes out of the East and goes to the West, following the sunwise turn. A queer thing, but it's true.

"I mind the time they used to tell me, and me a child in Ireland, of Hy Brasil in the West, where every man was king in daily rotation so that all could have a chance. 'A virgin country, with gold in the rocks and salmon in the waters, and justice being dispensed night and day.' And then suddenly they had America, a country to make Hy Brasil of. A great pity if they spoil it; a great pity, surely."

She could not see, no more than he could, that America as yet was the greatest country in the world. As yet, indeed, it was hardly a country at all, as a boy in his 'teens was not yet a man, but a graceless hobbledehoy. Already, however, it was changing, reaching on manhood's verge. The voice of it was changing from the boastful, childish treble to the deep rumble of a man's tones. And when it had

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

grown to manhood it should receive its fortune to have and to hold. In the solemn gift of that she would have her share. Others might help its roaring factories; others shape its magnificent policies, but with her peers, her share would be to launch its pregnant argosies, journeying from sunrise unto sunset and from pole to pole.

A man's dream, but in her, a young and graceful girl, she felt arise the spirit and the power to carry it out. Other women were working night and day, in a changed world, where the old conventional conventions had been cast aside, as science had cast aside the trappings of alchemy, and government the mask of deceit. In the fields women were working, at the lathes in the factories, at the politics of the country. Surely she, too, might take her place in the new battalions, grasping a bigger work than any of them, big as a big man's. And if she did need a man, as, vaguely and intuitively, she felt she would and as her father seemed certain, there was John, her brother John. There was no initiative in John, no vision—that must be faced. But she could provide that. She would be the flame and the mind. John would be the presence and the voice.

"Derith!" her father called . . .

v

He was sitting there as she had left him, before the fire, his stick in his hands. There was on his face the look of contentment that seemed to denote a problem solved or a resolution taken. Never to her eyes had he seemed more hale, and it struck her

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

with a sense of shock that he was ten years and more above the age the Psalmist allotted unto men.

"Derith," he said, "I want to ask you a question. I am a rich man—a very rich man. When I die the money goes to John and you. Is that your money?"

"I suppose so," she said, puzzled.

"It is not," he told her, abruptly. "If I were to leave you that money, and you were merely to spend it—a house in New York and Newport, a yacht to take your pleasure, a winter in Florida or on the Riviera—would that be right?"

"It doesn't sound so, sir," she agreed.

"It is not." He was dreamy for a moment. "Life, my dear, is a simple thing, when you are old. You look back and the principle has been very simple. It's like a great sea, do you understand, and you make your voyage from the slips of your birth to the big Last Haven. And some days you navigate by sun and stars, and at times you've got to go by dead-reckoning. The course isn't simple. There's shoals and reefs and sand-bars; there's foul and treacherous weather; there's the derelicts of foundered crafts that may bring you to ruin in mid-sea, but in the end you come in, clean and holy-stoned, the damage of the voyage repaired, and the Great Harbor master boards you and sees if your papers are in order. . . . You can't be towed across, my dear. The Harbor master won't let you in. . . ."

"I see, father," she breathed slowly.

"Now, when I'm leaving you this money," he went on, "I'm leaving you a lot more. In a way

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

I'm leaving you the men who helped me make it. I'm leaving them in trust to you. There's a responsibility on me, too, to see that all's docked in proper order before I quit the bridge. Your aim should not be to make money—have it, by all means, but there's more. I can't explain it to you—but I can feel it, and I'm a very old man. You've got to treat those people right—see that they're properly fitted for their own voyage. There's only one way to do it."

"Go on, sir."

"There's one thing in all of us, the worst and the best, that keeps you straight on your course, and that's conscience. It always points the right way, the way the compass needle holds you straight. If you're off your course or you quit the wheel, your conscience will tell you. If you're on your course and keeping your watch, you can look every swab in the eye and tell him to go to hell. Always feel like that, Derith—always!"

"I'm telling you this for your own good, for yours and John's. You could, you know, as they nearly all do, just spend the money and have a good time. Let go your wheel and your business will come into the wind and stay there all right. You wouldn't suffer. . . . I'm not much on religion, but I like it when it's sensible. I'm thinking now of the camel and the needle's eye. . . ."

VI

She was quiet for a while, standing by the mantel and looking into the fire, letting what he had said seep into her brain.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Go out, Derith," he asked her, "and look at the night."

She turned to go out, a little smile on her mouth. It was queer how he would follow his solemn words with an old man's whim. She whistled to the dogs.

"Come, Bran. Come, Sgeolan. Come, boys."

The moon had risen high now, clear and silvery, with its valleys and mountain ranges showing like faint flaws in a precious stone. From the beach, a hundred yards away, came the whispering chorus of the wavelets on the shore. A great night, a friendly night, she thought. The dogs nuzzled her hands on either side.

"A fine night, sir, with the moon high!" she called to him.

Within, the old man had begun humming again. His voice suddenly took on body, became clear:

*"Anois teacht an t'Samhraidh, beidh an la 'g'ul chum sineadh.
Is tar eis la 'le Choluim, inneosad mo sheol."*

"Now, at the coming of summer," she remembered the translation smilingly, "the day will be lengthening out, and after Saint Colum's day I shall haul up my sail—"

"Tell me, daughter," her father called out, "how is the wind?"

The wind was all about her, very gentle, very perfumed. There was in the air the scent of clover and the salt tang of the sea, and there were little noises in it, the rustle of the multitude of grass and the gentle soughing of the oak-trees—a faint, nostalgic minor melody, as of unseen thrumming psalteries.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"A firm, gentle breeze, sir," she called back, "blowing eastward."

*"Thrid abhainn is uisge, 'sa' la is san oidhche,
Ni dheanfaidh me stad go dti Connda Mhuigheo!"*

"By river and sea," went on the song, full, exultant, "by night and by day—I shall make no stop until I come to the County of Mayo!" She had an impression that her father was standing up while singing.

"The dear old gentleman!" she thought, and her eyes misted with tears.

The dog on her right hand, Bran, stiffened suddenly, and stiffened simultaneously Sgeolan on her left. They quitted her and ran, with queer snuffling whines, toward the door of the house. They stopped and turned and ran backward past her.

"Bran, Sgeolan, what's wrong? Here, boys, here!"

Bran raised his great shaggy head and, pointing eastward, broke into a long, melancholy baying. Sgeolan joined in. Their great tones rang well out to sea.

"Here! Here!" Derith cried.

Inside the house she heard, as it were, a bustle, and an instant later came the housekeeper's voice, frightened, excited, distinct even above the heart-broken wailing of the wolf-hounds.

"Your father's dead. Come in, Miss Derith. Come in, Miss Derith; your father's dead."

CHAPTER II

I

HE raised his puzzled eyes to her face. The girl was smiling, but the smile concealed a certain wary tenseness.

"But I should like to tell Derith," he said.

"I'd rather you didn't, Jack," she countered.

"But why?" he insisted.

"You asked me to marry you," she told him, petulantly. "It wasn't I who asked. I've got some rights."

"I know," he agreed. His voice was humble. With her red hair, and her green eyes, and her dull, creamy skin, Jeanie McPherson was very dramatic. She was convincing. And now when she showed a certain amount of wilfulness young Keogh thought it better to give in. "I'll do what you say, but I wish you'd meet Derith. She'd welcome you with open arms."

The red-haired girl turned away her head to smile. In her feminine heart she knew better.

"She and I will meet time enough, John," she said, "when we're married." She became wheedling. She sat on the arm of his chair. "Won't you humor me in this, honey?" she asked. She buried her head in his shoulder, still smiling a little. "Tell the truth

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

and shame the devil, I'm afraid, ashamed," she confessed.

"But there's nothing, honey, to be ashamed of. Because you're a workman's daughter—pshaw!" he laughed. "You don't know my sister."

Still and all, she was stubborn. "I won't, I can't. I'll marry you to-morrow—any time you say—because I love you," went her muffled voice, exultantly, "but I don't want to meet your sister first."

"My dear! My dear!" he told her. He held her in his arms tenderly. "But you're making a mistake. Derith will love you." Still in his shoulder, the red-haired girl smiled, a cunning, knowledgeable smile, somewhat bitter, a little cruel.

II

Until three years before, when an unexpected legacy from a wastrel uncle in Melbourne had changed conditions, there had not been one day in her life on which Jeanie McPherson and her mother had not experienced poverty, stark, sordid poverty.

The father, James McPherson, from Forfarshire in Scotland, had been a noted golf professional in his day, but from the day of his marriage to the girl's mother he had gone down-hill. The McPherson woman had the regular face, the large-boned body, the hard eyes of a shrew. It was easier for him from any standpoint to hang around saloons, being bought drinks by gentlemen players, than to remain in the house under that continual biting fire of faultfinding, that was as much a vice in his wife as drink or profligacy would be in another person. A lost match would

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

bring down a torrent of scorn on his head, from which he would flee to the nearest bar. By well-defined steps he fell, little by little, until there was no place for him in the sporting world. In the end he came to New River, where he got a job as inspector in a silk-factory, a lazy position paying a pittance. Then he died. Jeanie's memory of her father was of a lank, melancholy man who wilted silently beneath her mother's vituperation as a reed might bend before the wind.

Came then poverty worse than before; her mother's working as a seamstress from morning until night—the eternal click of needle and thimble, the whir of a sewing-machine. An infinity of dull, dark days—dark even when the sun was shining; degrading visits to the pawnshop around the corner, kept by a flabby, unhealthy Englishman with drooping mustache and a leering eye. There was theft, even—the sordid extraction of nickels and pennies and dimes from pocketbooks left open here and there. And through it all her mother would never allow her to work, kept her idle, kept her at school.

"I'm giving you an advantage I never had," she would snarl at the girl. "I'm killing myself so that you can have a chance." Her eyes would glower bitterly at her daughter. "You'll pay me some day."

Out of that welter of sordid muck like the McPherson home there spring often strange, exotic flowers. They become great courtezans, great actresses, women Ishmaels. What with her glorious, exciting red hair; with her eyes, sometimes gray like the sea, more often green as jade; with her skin

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

white as an egg, soft as cream; with her little-breasted, supple-hipped body, like a quick, graceful lizard—she was of the type that wins kingdoms. She might have married some young, ambitious burgess and raised him a brood of sturdy, honest citizens, living in solid comfort, but she had seen too much of poverty; she wanted wealth. She might have gone off with some young aristocrat, living with him the halcyon years, until his station required suitable marriage, and then being pensioned off, to live in placid benignity or to progress as far as Cléo de Mérode did, or Hortense Flexner, or the other great ones of the guild. But there was no softness in her. She would never have the romance to begin. She might have joined a chorus of musical comedy and set the old *roués* aflame with her strange beauty, but she was wise as a cat. With one man alone would her beauty bring its price. Marriage; nothing less.

"There's none like you," her mother would say, eying her appraisingly. "You'll find your man, all right." And then the old shrew would go into day dreams of her state when her flesh and blood would be united to a millionaire.

But there was one mistake old Margaret McPherson made. She let her daughter see how much of an investment, how much of a chattel, she was in her mother's eyes.

"Twenty dollars a week I had when I was forewoman in Genug's store in Boston," the mother would complain, "and three hundred dollars I had saved when I met your father and married him. All that gone and spent. But I'll see that I get it back." She would turn her terrible eyes on the girl. "I'll

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

get it if I have to tear your eyes out with these five finger-nails!"

Hate, venomous as a snake's ichor, cold as ice, bred in the girl's heart against this woman who had borne her. Jeanie's mingling with her schoolmates and the cleanly habits of the New World had filled her with disgust at the slack filth of the elder woman. She might have pardoned her mother's occasional indecencies. She might have pardoned her mother's occasional drunkenesses, when she took, as she said with a leer, a drop "for her stomach's sake and her often infirmities." But she could never forgive the rages in which the mother beat her black and blue for a peccadillo, for a whim. She might have left the woman then, but—do you see?—she needed the shelter of relationship, the unquestioned standing when the banker of her dreams came around. Instead, she threw herself on her creaking cot in the woman's bedroom, and hit her pillow with rage and shook with sobs.

"God! God! God!" she would breathe in unrestrained fury.

I have little use for Jeanie McPherson. Little? None at all! But her mother? God forgive me for speaking ill of the dead! But I have more respect for the trull in a by-street.

III

If she had roamed the wide world over the McPherson girl could have found none more suited to her design than John Keogh.

Through the town she had often heard speak of him, as early as eight years before, when at sixteen he

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

had won the junior golf championship. She could remember two years ago when he had won the discus throwing at Stockholm in the Olympic games, and the papers of the state were full of his exploit, and New River turned out for a gala-day. It was about this time, too, when Andrew McKechnie, the wastrel uncle, had died in Melbourne, leaving behind such a fortune as with moderate foresight would keep the McPhersons in a state of comfort for a few years.

"Enough," old Margaret thought, "to bait the hook to catch the fish."

They took another house and furnished it in a manner befitting their station, a comfortable artisan's home, solid, tasteful enough in a way, with mighty few grotesqueries—there the daughter's hand might be observed, who had been quick enough with her education and adaptive quality to pick up the difference between fair taste and vile, and her mother's wisdom who had let her daughter have free way. There were new dresses for the girl. There was a church, where she might encounter social preferment.

It was at a Red Cross golf tournament that she first met John Keogh. She had been chosen with four others of a church society to sell refreshments in the big tent. A churchwarden, who was also a business man, knew the value of pretty girls at charity affairs. In the afternoon Keogh, who was being groomed for the Metropolitan, dropped in with the golf professional for a lemonade.

"And here's a wee lady that's been brought up on golf," the professional introduced Jeanie. "Her great-uncle was Tom Morris. Her father was Andrew McPherson that won the first open championship of

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

this country. A gifted, canny player, who's dead now. A wonderful hand wi' a cleek; could drive a full shot from off a watch-glass, wi'out a tee, and not hurt the face. Her name is McPherson, ma bonny Jean!"

All the life of John Keogh had been so taken up with sports, at Groton, at college—where he left without a degree—that he had little or no time for girls in it. Those he had met, his sister's friends and his friends' sisters, had been of the tittering, self-sufficient, school-girl type who were too much interested in themselves to be interested in men. Or if they were interested in men they were interested in them as an abstract formula, typified to them by the honest melodrama of Willard Mack, or by the stage nobility of the Barrymores, or if they were what they flattered themselves was intellectual, by the man-of-the-worldliness of Arnold Daly. One thing was certain, they were not thrilled by a young amateur athlete who was quite plain, who had only sufficient brains to carry him through the ordinary routine of life, and was very shy.

He could never have stepped into his father's shoes nor into the shoes of any of his father's subordinates, who were chosen for insight and decision. Give the boy on trust any routine thing to do and it was assured he would accomplish it. A magnificent set of muscles, a fair amount of intelligence, a puzzled outlook on life, which one was inclined to smile at; a great sense of sportsmanship—that was his equipment. His father recognized his limitations, and was somehow thoroughly satisfied. He was proud of the boy, too, when he came home after his athletic victories.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"So you beat him again," the old man would shout. "By God! I'm proud; that's what I am. There was always one of the family could beat the world!" And he would think, though he never mentioned it much, of the time when he broke the back of Ibrahim Ali, the Pasha of Jaffa's wrestler, and when he swam from New Bedford to Nantucket Light. In the great days!

John, he decided, would do as head of the business when he was gone. Derith would furnish the spirit. John was impeccably honest, "and when a thing's once started all it needs is honesty to bring it along." He had no fears about it now. He was satisfied. He liked the boy, every inch of him, every thought. He was amused when he heard that John was paying a measure of devotion to a girl down in the workmen's district.

"So you've gone courting, John," he said to the lad, who was blushing furiously. "And what's the harm? Sure, a bit of courting is the salt of life!" And he chuckled, remembering his old wild, romantic days when there wasn't a woman within a mile's length of him to whom he hadn't made love.

"But I'll take care of him," he thought, wisely. "And when I'm gone Derith will." But he was gone—poor gentleman!—and Derith was ignorant of the whole matter when matters came to a crisis between his son John and the red-haired, green-eyed girl.

IV

Things had gone far when the old ship-builder had died. His son had passed through the various stages

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of young and first love, and the ordinary time had come for disillusionment—the time when a young man finds that the girl is not the pattern and mirror of all beauty, when he is jarred by a thought, a look, an insipid or ungracious remark. You could not find any physical fault in Jean McPherson, beyond the hardness of the eyes; even the ankles and wrists, those inevitable evidences of race, were slim and shapely—perhaps a heritage from some dim and secret gentleman lover of a bygone generation. She was too wise to shock him mentally or spiritually—moreover, she had better mentality than he, and she could affect a gentility that might have passed currency anywhere, so much had she studied in intense envy the surroundings of her school friends.

Little by little the affair gathered momentum. Johnny Keogh passed the calf-love stage; loved her with a firm, honest affection; began to feel the solemn, assured promptings of sex—as he would feel it, an honest, defined, necessary thing, whose responsibilities he was willing to incur. She, sensitive to the movements of him as a cat might be to the maneuvers of a bird, knew the game was safe.

"I've got him," she said, exultantly. "I've got him." And she looked forward to life as a general might look at a beleaguered city, certain of its downfall, calculating in advance the extent of its treasure and enjoying in prospect the glorious, riotous days.

Her mother, whom she kept apart, or allowed only to appear in the character of a gentle old lady, worn with the struggle of an upright life, caring only for the future of her daughter, noticed that assured smile.

"So you've got him where you want him," old

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Margaret gloated, in overt, malignant glee. "See you don't lose him. If you do—" and even her vitriolic tongue could not frame threats potent enough to meet such a contingency.

Six months before he had asked her to marry him, in his blundering, sincere way. "When we are married," he would mention as a certain thing. But he put no definite date to the project. "But I've no intention of marrying you," she would laugh, noticing the omission. He would grow impatient, bold. "We are all right as we are now," she would plead; "later, perhaps . . ." And he would have to be content with that. But there grew up an intangible but firm understanding that one day they were to be married, and he was to live happily ever afterward—and she, too, she smiled, she would take care of that.

It took form in his head that they would be married when his father died. His father knew, of course, that he was experiencing his first love with a girl of the people down-town, but that it was assuming proportions of seriousness the old sailor never dreamed. Vague intuition warned the younger Keogh not to tell his father of his ultimate intentions. He admired, he trusted, he loved the old gaunt master with his eagle nose and eyes, his white, patriarchal beard and the little gold rings in his ears, but he would not tell him of the marriage. His father would want this and that and the other thing. Because he was old, he would figure and ponder and worry and raise innumerable objections, as old men will. The boy knew it was right, superlatively, miraculously right, but the old man would have to be won over, argued with, fought.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Better not worry him," the boy temporized with his conscience.

"You'll not say anything to your father; promise," Jean had asked him again and again, and that was another reason he had let the situation go by. He didn't understand her, but she knew what she was doing—damned well she did! Himself a man who had had four wives, one a spiritual Irish girl of the mountain people, and one a gorgeous demirep of France, one a veiled, mysterious Turkish woman, and one a kind and upright Quaker lady, and numerous loves besides, if rumor were true, he would see through her in an instant. A short laugh and he could break her as effectually as though his sinewy, tattooed hands had caught her by the neck and heels and snapped her spine. He was the first hurdle on her race to the wealth she coveted. Better not jump it. It was teetering now. Better wait until it fell down.

And so it happened humanly in the end of his full days that Shane Butler died. She was exultant. John, coming home hurriedly from his golf-tournaments at Wykagyl and Baltusrol and Garden City, to lay the old mariner at rest by the sea, had no time for her. It was only after a week that he came, mute and depressed, his boyish face already assuming lines of responsibility. She held his hand in silence while, by a miracle of mummery, her green eyes filled with tears.

"He was a great man," the boy said. "If ever a great man lived, it was my father!" She pressed his hand in sympathy, while her heart beat proudly that old Shane of the Keoghs was dead.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Handle him carefully now," her mother counseled her. "The time for playing him is over. Bring him carefully to land. Mind he doesn't get away on you."

"I don't like your talking like that." Even in Jeanie's bartering little soul her mother's continual heartless cunning grated. Old Margaret promptly gave her a vicious open-hander across the ear. "How dare you talk to me like that?" she shrilled; "me who's given my heart's blood for you, who's brought you where you are to-day. You stinking little slut! You'll do what I tell you or I'll cut your heart out." And she went off to enjoy a rhapsody of the good time coming to her, when she could cut all her acquaintances in the street and act high and mighty toward those who had once befriended her. She would get her teeth drawn, she decided, and have a new set made to order. She would dye her hair, too. She was a young woman, yet . . .

It could not have been more than a month after the passing of Shane Keogh that Margaret McPherson died, in one of those horrible bilious attacks of hers. Right in her grasp lay the thing she coveted. In two, in three months more, at most, she had calculated, she would be the mother of the wife of the younger Keogh, dipping her predatory hands into the Keogh fortune, turning that magnificent edifice of honest work and virile dreams to her own petty, selfish, sordid, maleficent ends. Death, the most silent arbiter of fortune, summoned her from her little vicious wish into a void as great as the universe, and instead of puny machinations gave her a mystery to ponder on. And left her no dignity—a stark

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

figure, with one malignant eye open, like a formed but unuttered curse. And her daughter smiled.

So, with one sweeping move, the problems of Jeanie McPherson were solved. In orphan's black, that showed off her creamy skin and silhouetted her splendid features and backgrounded her red hair with a strange perversity—all like some painter's device—she appeared to John Keogh like a stricken figure in a Greek tragedy. Her gray-green eyes, swollen, dark-lined with induced weeping, stared at him with a fierce appeal.

"I've got no one in the world, now," she said, in low tones. "All gone; no father, no mother, no friend—not even an enemy. Oh, the thousand millions of people in the world!" she sobbed, "and against them just me, a broken girl!"

"You've got me, and you've got mine," he said, bravely, putting his arm around her. "Get your things ready and you'll come home with me, to Derith."

"No! No!" she said. "No! I will not!" And from that decision she could not be moved.

She got an old woman to come and stay with her in the house; that lasted for a fortnight only. Every evening he came to see her.

"It's lonely," she said. "It's lonely in this house, Jack. I think of nothing but my poor mother who's gone. See there at the table she used to sit, sewing a little to pass the time. In my bedroom, where she died, I see her when I go to bed, putting on her spectacles over her poor, dear, tired eyes and reading a chapter in the Bible before she undressed. Old Jane and I—we talk of her all the time—"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"You've got to get out of this," young Keogh said, decisively. "You won't come to the house?"

"No!" she insisted. "No! I can't, Jack, I just can't."

"Well, then," he said, with a bit of a tremor, "there is nothing else for it. You've got to marry me at once. I can't have you staying here."

"It could only be done one way," she told him, and that was quietly, with only their two selves in the secret. People would stand in horror of them were it otherwise. Their parents' bodies hardly cold yet in the grave . . .

"But it's got to be," he told her. "I can't let you remain on here."

Very well, then, if he must, she consented, only it had to be this way . . .

And so on the morrow he told his sister he was going down to New York for a week.

"I'm feeling awfully seedy, sis; I don't know why. I'm going to run down to New York and play a couple of the courses. I promised George Low to play again at Baltusrol."

"You look nervous, boy," she conceded. "I've never seen you like that before. Sure you're not sickening for something?" She was two years his junior, but she regarded him solicitously, as a mother might.

"Nothing at all," he laughed. "I'm just a bit seedy. A round at Baltusrol and Siwanoy and Essex County will take my mind off things. I'll be able to come back and buckle in."

The next morning there was more in his good-by than his usual casualness. He was going to New

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Bedford to get a few things before taking the night boat down. He hung about his sister in a manner strange to him.

"Well, sis, I'd better be off. . . ."

"You're queer, Jack." She looked at him worriedly. "I don't know what it is, but you're strange. I think I'd better come along with you."

"No! No!" he objected. "There's nothing. Good-by, sis!" He kissed her and plunged away.

In New Bedford he met Jean, and together they went to old Doctor Kendricks, the Dutch Reformed clergyman, who looked at them with smiling eyes.

"So you're twenty-four and she's twenty-one," he said. "A nice age. But surely your parents or relatives should be with you."

"My father is dead, sir. And her mother died recently. She has nobody in the world but me. And she's a little shy as yet of meeting my people. I couldn't leave her alone. . . ."

"I see, I see." The kindly old pastor nodded. "That is what a woman marries for, to be loved and protected and to be sheltered from the hazards of the world."

He took them into his study; gathered some casual witnesses, and began reading the service.

As in a daze, they hardly heard the solemn words in the quavering voice of the old cleric. Mechanically they gave the necessary responses; mechanically followed the ritual:

" . . . this woman to be thy lawful wife, for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health . . . "

Outwardly stolid, he listened, and for the second

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

time in his life inwardly unstolid he felt a ritual. Only six weeks before they, with majesty, had consigned his father to his grave. Now there was being consigned to his care this unprotected and gentle girl, and behind the solemn words of the old clergyman he felt the unwritten covenant of the sportsman's guild—fair play and a protection to the weak, and chivalry toward women. Into his hands now he was accepting the trust of her, to cherish and protect her in all eventualities. Solemnly and significantly he answered, "I do!"

"I do!" she answered also, in a low and nervous voice, for it appeared unusual to her in a way, that in the end things should so easily come into her possession. So consciously venal were her intentions as she maneuvered this solemn pact that from the moment she had entered the minister's she had been foolishly afraid that the marriage would be somehow stopped. In the pause after the old man had challenged the objector to step forth or forever after hold his peace her heart had stopped beating, and for an infinitesimal fraction of time life stood still. In that supreme woman's hour it had occurred to her that a shining angel might thrust them apart with a flaming, cross-hilted sword.

"With all my worldly goods I thee endow!"

Out of the solemn ritual the words dropped like a promise. There was the gist of the matter, the substance of it all. That she understood. Her drowsing imagination wakened and she knew that now she was of the fellowship of the rich. By a formula of words, potent as a formula of magic, there was now in her grasp all she had dreamed in cor-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

ruptive envy. No longer would she glower in pale anger at the photographs in Sunday supplements of the wealthy at summer resorts or wintering in the South. All that was hers now, to have and to hold. Millionaires! Why, she was a millionaire, who had once been the daughter of a drunkard and a shrewish slut! The land of plenty was hers, to loot and ruin, if she wished, to hold to tribute, to squeeze until the last drop of wealth had filled her veins. Now she would go away, no longer afraid. She would meet his sister Derith. Who was his sister Derith, now?

The ceremony was over, and in his big, clumsy, affectionate way John had taken her in his arms.

"There is nothing can hurt you now," he said, tenderly. "You will never be lonely again!"

He looked into her eyes to see the modest look of brides he had expected there. Instead there was a look of proud exultation that showed through them like a keen green flame. He felt a queer sense of shock. . . .

The old minister gazed at them from the window as they got in the car. He had not seen that look. He was very happy.

"Young and fine-looking." He nodded his head. "A little girl alone in the world, and the fairy prince comes to her." He nodded his white head. "Of such," he said, quaveringly—"of such is the Kingdom of Heaven!"

CHAPTER III

I

DERITH KEOGH had come into her father's office in the ship-building works, the mellow, broad, somewhat luxurious room, with its drawings of ships upon the walls—the *Challenge* with her three pagodas of sail, her graceful jibs, and square jigger-mast; and an engraving of East-Indiamen keeling to port, pooped like old Spanish men-of-war, with porpoises playing in the foreground; the *Hurricane* with her sharp lines and rolling topsails. There were a few likenesses of her father's friends here and there—of Zerega who commanded the *Queen of Clippers*; of Captain Bowers of the *Black Hawk*, of Mackay on the quarter-deck of the *Sovereign of the Seas*.

She had taken off her hat and coat and she sat in her father's chair, her slim white hands on the big mahogany table. She was speaking to young Angus Campbell, the manager of the works.

“. . . He wanted everything to go on, Angus, and I'm going to take up the work—John and I.”

“Yes, he wanted it to go on.”

“There's another thing. The night he died he in a way gave everything to me in a solemn trust. He said the workmen must be looked after, given everything in justice. The money he left means nothing

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

to me, except as a thing to carry on his work and to make any reforms necessary."

He rose from the chair he was sitting in and walked to the window, a compact man of medium height, whose terrific shoulders and chest made him less tall than he really was. Fair-haired, with a face bronzed and weather-beaten from his three years at sea, with his firm, somewhat heavy jaw and cold gray eye, he looked like the original pattern of a man built for responsibility and command. An ideal first mate for sail or steam a mariner would have judged him.

"There you're in difficulty." He turned around on her, his hands in his pockets. "Labor conditions are queer just now. You've either got to stand by your guns and give them nothing or you've got to give them a lot. The trouble is where to stop in the giving!"

She listened to him intently, for she knew he understood the situation. And she trusted him, for she had been brought up with him as with a foster-brother. He and John and she had been playmates, friends, accomplices, as far back as she could remember.

"You're going to be head of the business, Derry—"

"John and I—and you, Angus."

"We'll talk about John later. As for me, I'm paid to know the business. I'm your friend. But I'm for a square deal for the workmen, too."

"That's what I want to get at."

"You've got to make some changes to keep the men. Your father was a just man—just to every one, and from him the workmen didn't ask much.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

He was the kind they would have worked for for nothing. They gave him the loyalty a dog gives."

"Well, we'll give them what they want. We can run everything. John and I are ready to make any concessions—"

He turned to her suddenly.

"Listen, Derry," he said, point-blank, "I've got some bad news for you. It's about John."

"About John!" She paled and rose, her hand to her breast.

"He's married!"

She looked at him dully for a minute as though she did not understand. Her mind suddenly went back to the morning when John had seemed so nervous, so uncertain of himself. That was just three days ago.

"On Saturday?"

"On Saturday," Campbell nodded. "I got a letter from him last night. He asked me to tell you."

"Who is she, Angus?" she asked, fearfully. "Is she somebody I know?"

"I'll tell you the truth, Derith," he said, solemnly. "We may as well face it. I made inquiries about her. She's a mercenary little gutter-snipe who'll lead John by the nose, who'll bleed him for every possible dollar. John, Derry, John—he's done for!"

"Poor John!" Her eyes filled and she began to tremble. "Poor John!"

He turned away from her and looked out of the window. Below him in the space between the offices and the river he saw the great ship-works extend, a vast field of gigantic cradles and iron beams. Men moved hither and thither like pygmies. Slender,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

incredibly strong structures of twisted, latticed steel rose in a measured forest. Here and there on the slips hulks lay like stripped giants. The bustle and rush of the work came like the noise of a titanic smithy. There was the loud, terrible cachinnation of the electric rivets, the crash of hammer on steel, now staccato, now rumbling, like immense drums. Here and there men's voices rose in a bellow, were weakened in the maelstrom of din, and came faintly to the office inconsequential as the droning of flies.

“Poor John!”

Campbell turned around and looked at her, so slight, so spiritual, so feminine, bowed a little and shaking with fought-off sobs. Again the greatness without compelled him—the mighty works tended by iron-thewed, grimy men. And in his eyes it took on personality and proportion until it seemed like a giant of pre-Noë days, when the thrones and principalities saw that the daughters of Earth were fair and descended to wed them—vast, black, hairy, one-eyed, malignant sometimes, at all times hard to train and govern. And this was what Derith Keogh had undertaken to direct and conquer, as another woman might undertake to raise a child.

“Poor John!” she bowed her head. “Poor, poor buddy John!”

“Poor you!” Campbell said, half savagely. “Poor you!”

II

All men who had sailed under old Shane Keogh admired him. Many loved the old man. A few were admitted to his friendship, and of that few none

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

got such a share of it as Enoch, father of Angus Campbell.

There was nothing spectacular about the Bute sailor—short, compact, self-respecting, walking the poop on his watch, his eye ever alert, there seemed to be nothing in common between the obscure fourth mate and the famous master mariner. Men saw little in Campbell beyond reliability, but that was the point that Keogh admired him for.

"There's only one man on God's green earth I trust with everything—that's Enoch Campbell," the ironmaster is on record as having said. "I sleep soundly when he's on watch. Your ship's safe. Only the unforeseen act of God can touch it."

Unfamed, except among ship-owners, Enoch Campbell went the mysterious way of the bosom friends of great men. Thirty years old Shane's junior, he was still and all more close to the old man than brother or son. The old man stayed ashore now, minding his business ventures. It was the young man who brought to him the prosaic chronicle of the sea, the state of winds and soundings, of tempests and gossip in foreign ports, of old skippers met in the West Indies or passed on the route to the Horn.

When Campbell married, old Shane presented his freckled, high-cheek-boned Scotch wife with a mandarin coat he had brought home from Shanghai, a contrast that made the old sailor shiver in horror, he who had such a fine eye for a woman and woman's dress. But the poor little woman had mentioned something once, perhaps meaning a wrap or kimono, and she got a coat fit for the consort of the Prince

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of Chang. And when her son was born and she died and her husband was somewhere in the China Seas, it was old Keogh who took care of the boy, had him baptized, and stood as godfather. There is still a little old clergyman who will never forget the gigantic figure with the long gray beard and the little gold ear-rings, who held the child, and who glared at the officiant so hard that he nearly forgot the service. . . .

And when off Gay Head, on those terrible spikes of the Devil's Bridge, Enoch Campbell's first accident happened, and the gallant *City of Scranton* broke her back beneath his feet, it was to the care of old Shane Keogh that he sent his boy. He had taken little Angus, seven years old, with him on the round trip from Boston to a Southern port. When the tragedy happened he called the freckled, wide-eyed, gap-toothed youngster to him and put him in charge of a boatswain.

"You've got to go, my laddie," he announced to the child. "I've got to stay here."

"All right, father," the child lisped.

He looked at his father, gripping the rail of the bridge while the life-boat swung over the davits and let fall. Enoch watched the boy as the boat fought its way through the welter of foam shoreward. That was the last they saw of each other.

Shane had his own two children by that time, Derith and John. He threw young Angus in with them, and the three grew up together. They were cared for in a manner by their foster-brother, four years older than they. With a magnificent fair play, Angus pummeled now one, now the other. They

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

were a pretty group. People remember Angus in the foreground, freckled; stolid, Scotch, his gray eyes watching you suspiciously and bravely; Derith beside him, clinging to him a little, a smile dimpling the corners of her mouth; behind them John sucking his thumb, vacant-looking and very trustful. Later they scattered at different times to their different schools—Angus went to Groton, and there followed him four years later John. Weeping copiously, Derith was sent to the Misses Watt's Academy for Young Ladies. Angus came home first.

"I'll send you to Annapolis," old Shane told him; "that is, if you want to go. Or you can stay here and come into the business, or, for the matter of that, you can do what you damn well like."

"I'd like well to stay with you, and with Jack and Derry," the boy said, straightforwardly.

"And stay you shall, by God! laddie!" the old man said. He sent him to sea for two years and then had him take up marine architecture at a neighboring technical institute. When that was finished he looked him up and down. He pointed to the shipyards.

"Out wi' you now, and earn your keep."

He was beginning to feel old and he was glad to have young Angus caring for his interests and his children's interest in the works. John had by this time blossomed into one of the greatest amateur athletes of his day. He had won the world's championship with the discus, and lost by a putt to the old master in the Open Golf Championship on the eighteenth green. Old Shane was satisfied, but for his own wise design he didn't say so.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I doubt if there's much good in John," he told Angus, "beyond his swimming and his golf."

"There's every good in John," Angus replied, hotly.

"You never see him killing himself at the works," Shane commented, dryly.

"Any time John does what he did last week—help bring in twenty-five thousand dollars to the Red Cross—I'll take care of his work as well as my own."

"You're a fine lad, Angus, a fine lad." The old man nodded. "And it's a comfort to me that you'll be by the children when I'm gone."

Derith by now had sprung up to young and bonny womanhood. Dark-haired, slim, utterly graceful, something glowed from her like pale pure light. Her body and features were nothing but a diaphanous, gracious garment for the lighted life within her. She seemed all spirit and yet somehow human of the humans, healthy—a girl to wife.

"I'm feeling all right about John," the old man said, "but about the girl, that's different! Derith is worrying me a bit. She's fine, she's game, like a race-mare, but, like a race-mare, she'll be hard to handle. I don't know! I don't know!"

The young man braced himself as for an effort. He looked old Shane straight in the eye.

"I would like to marry your daughter, sir."

"You would, would you?" the old sailor smiled. "And I'm not so certain I wouldn't like you to, myself." He said nothing for a while. "She's got a lot of money."

"I can't help that," Angus answered.

"No, you can't help that," Shane agreed. "No,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

by God! you can't help that," he exploded, suddenly, "but you can help her." He looked at Angus keenly. "You haven't asked her yet? You wouldn't like me to mention it to her?"

"I would not, sir," Angus rasped out.

"Good lad! The man who can't handle his own affairs with a woman doesn't deserve her."

"And I won't ask her for a long while yet, sir. Not until there's reason."

And while old Shane Keogh lived, and for whiles after that and until this writing, Angus Campbell had said nothing to her, had not even given her a word or look suggestive of love or passion or marriage.

CHAPTER IV

I

THE back room of the saloon on John Street was filled with tobacco smoke. It eddied about the dingy tables and made strange whorls and arabesques around the plated advertisements on the walls—the buxom, half-clad women who were on the cigarette placards and the stolid Teutonic men on the beer plates. It rose from the cigar butts in the cuspidors in Macaberesque spirals like the vapor from a magician's incanting fire. It hung about the four men around the corner table in a mysterious evil screen.

"We been looking for you to blow in for quite a while, Bum." Dolan, the hatchet-faced labor agitator with the burning eyes, turned to the newcomer.

"I've been up in Bethlehem," the Hunts Point Bum drawled. "I've been helping in the good work. There'll be trouble there."

"You've been a long time coming, but you've come at last," Krischenko, the lean, fanatic Russian, rasped. "Now what are you going to do?"

"Wait a moment. Wait a moment," came the drawling voice again. "Morel, how 're things?"

"If you want to start anything, you've got to start it yourself," the shaggy Austrian replied. "Up

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

at Mougel's silk-mills there's nothing doing. The workers are like fat cows. They give milk, they are well fed, that is all."

"And at the Keogh shipyards?"

"I don't think you can do anything there."

"Oh, can't I?" There shot out of the maze of smoke a strong-featured Roman face, somehow clerical-looking, with black hair and savage, hypnotic eyes, with a mouth that snarled like a dog's. "Listen. The old man is dead, and his daughter is going to run things now. She's ready to make any concessions to the workmen. She believes that a new age is opening for capital and labor, when the lion shall lie down with the lamb and the suckling child go to sleep upon the cockatrice's den."

"Heigh!" the Russian laughed.

"But if she gives the men what they want," Morel suggested, in perplexity.

"Listen again. Your shipyard workers are not the anemic weavers in the silk-mills, the dyers and throwsters that only ask for a meal and a place to sleep. Let them have what they want and let them want more and more. It is up to us to see to that until a point comes when, accustomed to concessions, and blown with selfishness, they will ask for everything and she will refuse it. And then, out on the streets! You can go far with a girl, where you couldn't go with a man."

"Go on, Bum," Dolan nodded. "I got you."

"Your workers in the East are led cattle, stalled oxen. They need a scourge to scatter them, and, by God! I'm it! In the West your Brotherhood is not tame. There's many a plant now in ashes that

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

a year ago was a busy mill. There's many a hundred and a thousand cattle poisoned on the ranges. The Black Cat has his back up. He spits and mews. There's one of us everywhere, ready to drive a spike in a log to wreck the circular saw of a mill, to put a bar of soap in a railroad engine and tie up a line. The Cat sits on the pick-handles in the mines. Salesmen are spoiling garments so that they can be sold only as damaged. The cabinet-maker, the journeyman tailor, all are working for the Day. Even in the houses of the rich our women are working as maids. It's easy to let the finest china break. We are not only inflaming labor against capital, but also capital against labor. Sooner or later the breaking-point will come."

"And then?" Krischenko's eyes were glowing.

The organizer rose from his seat. Through the dim haze of smoke in the ill-lighted room his figure and face hovered like a damned spirit invoked from behind the Veil.

"And then," his voice sang low, throbbingly, "red ruin will ride through the streets. The gutters will be red with blood. There will come a night when torches will illuminate the dark corners, and the sleek men who have lorded it over us for generations will be crucified to their own doors. They will dangle from the lamp-posts. Their bodies will block the sewers. Their women will go shrieking through the alleyways in their flimsy nightgowns. France will have seen nothing like it. The uprising of Russia, compared to it, will be a mummers' play. You, Dolan, can have your pick of the women, wives, doxies, daughters. You, Morel, can raid the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

larders for their choice foods, drink the vintage wines in their cellars, lie in their linen beds. Krischenko, you can help build over the ruins your damned Utopia. . . .”

“And you?” Krischenko asked.

“As for me, don’t worry about me,” was the laughing, snarling answer. “To see, that is satisfaction enough for me. . . .”

II

In that strange quarter-world which journeys from coast to coast, now walking the roads, now stealing rides in freight-cars, occasionally working for a few days in a printing-chapel or as a journeyman barber, not infrequently in jail, adroit at larceny, unafraid of rapine and murder, John Trevelyan had risen like a new star; had flamed across their ken like a comet, become a tradition and a promise.

At Hunts Point in New York his wanderings had begun; the wanderings that had carried him to Seattle and Portland when the labor troubles were on, had brought him to Utah when the dynamiters thought out a reign of terror, had found him in Colorado when the shooting was on at the Rockefeller mines. Everywhere he appeared lank, dark, glowing-eyed, diabolical, singing the song of the road:

“The spring has come. I’m just out of jail.
Haven’t any money. Haven’t any bail.
Hallelujah! I’m a bum—bum!
Hallelujah! Bum again!
Hallelujah! Give us a hand-out!
Revive us again!”

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"The Hunts Point Bum" the men of the road had named him, hobo and gay-cat, outcast, artizan, and crook, and as the Hunts Point Bum he was known. There was nothing about him to fill the popular conception of the hobo, the fat figure with the ancient beard, the tin can slung behind him, the yellow dog at his heel. Gray-shirted, felt-hatted, in worn clothes, he might have passed anywhere for an honest workman, except for the glowing eyes. The fire in those wiped away the trivialities of labor and food. There were in his possession secrets, feelings, designs, big enough to overturn a government. The Messiah of the Saboteurs, an Oregon journal had called him, after his famous speech at Portland, when he openly preached a holy war against property-owners.

"I have told you now, brothers, how a community lives which makes their money from us and our like; I have told you of their houses, their beds, their silverware. I have told you of their cars, their clubs, their banks. Naked came these people into the world, naked as a fish. Our endowment is their endowment, two hands and a spirit. And the spirit that is given them they have changed to a low cunning. And their arms have grown flabby and their chests weak.

"There was a Jew of Galilee many centuries ago who, in a time of darkness, preached a new and beautiful régime. So new, so straight, that none could resist it. 'I am the Light of the World,' said He!

"The cunning people of the shops and counting-houses, of the market-place, took his religion, and they made of it a weapon to their hands. With a

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

siren song of loving-kindness they have lulled the worker to sleep. They have a fabric of what they call Christian civilization, under cover of which they plunder the worker and the poor man, the orphan and the widow. And their arms have grown flabby and their chests weak.

"And again a darkness has set on the world, and a Light is needed to show the way. Listen to me, brothers! I speak no parables. I speak straight words. Naked came these folk into the world, naked as a fish, naked as you and I. All they had was their spirit and their arms and hands. Their spirit has changed to a low cunning while ours still remains strong, incorrupt, terrible as an army with banners. Their arms are flabby and their chests are weak, while we remain broad-shouldered and iron-sinewed. You wanted a light to see in the darkness, and behold, I give it to you. *Ego sum illa lux mundi.* 'I am the Light of your world. . . .'"

Had he been merely an inflated orator he would have been easy to handle, but the man had brains. His fiery speeches were only a weapon in the hands of his purpose. He was fearless, too. And before him the officers and minions of the law stood uncertain as sleek watch-dogs might in the presence of a snarling, red-eyed wolf. None knew whence he came. The men of the road had a romantic idea that he was an aristocrat who had rebelled against a patently unrighteous scheme of things.

But they would have been aghast and terror-struck had they seen him before his metamorphosis at Hunts Point, a white-robed figure of a lay brother in a monastery, devoted to the rule of his order, attentive

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

at matins and lauds, exalted daily by the mystery of the Real Presence. Unwitting of the world outside, with downcast eyes and glowing heart, he went about his monachal duties, glorying in the thought that one day he, too, would come in vestments on the altar and in low-toned Latinity recite the ritual of Jerusalem and by his formula perform the mightiest of all miracles. . . .

A few times he had spoken to the prior, Father Ambrose, now that the days of his novitiate were finished, about his call to the priesthood. The old cleric had put him off. There came, however, one inevitable occasion when he was importunate in his pleading. The prior could no longer postpone an explanation.

"My son," he told the young novice, "do you know anything about your parents?"

"No, Father," the monk answered. "I was brought to the college in New York from the Presentation Nuns, and from there I was sent here. I believe them to have died when I was very young."

"Your father is not dead," the prior told him. "He is in a monastery in England."

"A priest!" The young man's eyes widened. "He became a priest when my mother died?"

"Your father was a priest before he met your mother," the superior told him, with averted eyes. "He was a dean in a great English cathedral. He became infatuated with one of the choir singers and fled with her to America. He was married to her there—in the sight of men, I mean. She died when you were born. He repented and entered a Trappist

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

community. So you see, my son, with all the circumstances—”

“You think it better for me not to be ordained.” The lay brother was curiously white. His voice was ominously quiet.

“I do, my son!” The prior took a pinch of snuff.

Curiously, there was no sense of blind sorrow or amazement in young Trevelyan. In one instant by some distorted alchemy a blind, cruel raging filled him, turning the sweet piety of him into bitter gall, as milk is bittered by thunder. About him in magnificent chaos the edifice of his exalted hopes dropped in minute dust, and in the midst of it he stood, tragically alone.

“I see,” he said, coldly.

He was groping for an instant to find the situation, and instantly it was revealed to him. An officer of his religion, his ambition, his sacred dream, had fallen, and he was the result, the *corpus delicti*, as it were, of a spiritual crime. A priest, in his ideal, had always been a person apart from the world, cognizant of the secrets of the Veil. As a result of his chastity there was the eternal promise that he should follow the Lamb, wheresoever he goeth. All that had been a living belief to the young novice, and now it was a crumpled putridity. And he, of all men, he whose heart had vibrated to the celestial promise, whose ambition in life had been to preach in words of flame against the sins of the flesh, bringing multitudes to the standard of the chaste Lamb, he himself was a beast of revelation, as the great red dragon of St. John, unspeakable as the spawn of Adam and Lilith, a monstrosity of monstrosities, issue of an anointed

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

priest of God! An outcast in his communion; a bastard in his church; a priest's son!

"And so you see," the prior went on, "so as not to give scandal against our Holy Mother, the Church—"

The young novice was tearing the beads from his middle, ripping the habit from off his back.

"Give me some clothes, reverend sir." Trevelyan was panting. "Give me some clothes, so that I can go into the sinful world out of which I came."

CHAPTER V

FROM the moment he had stepped out of the minister's house with her until this moment now in New York, a month later, John Keogh had been noticing a subtle change in his wife Jean.

She had gone into the minister's house a broken, suppliant thing, clinging to him for protection, asking him to come for her, to lead her here and there. Now it was she who was doing the leading. It was she who planned the day's activities.

"I want you to take me to Sherry's for dinner"—or to the Ritz or to Browne's, as it might be—"and then we'll go to a show, and a little bit of dancing afterward."

He had let her have her own way for a week or so, hoping that it would take her mind from her mother's death, but her mind had not been on that since the day of their marriage. It had in a way shocked him to see how completely she had forgotten the old woman. She had forgotten everything in her past life. She was avid for every excitement; gluttonous in eating; wild for the theaters, cabarets, dancing-places; riotous in the buying of clothes. He had imagined himself taking her here and there, pointing out to her the various things of interest, imagining the bystanders to be sympathetically envious

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of him as he stood happily protective of his sweet, girlish, clinging wife. Instead he was brought hither and thither, like the dull tail of a gleaming comet, to flashy theaters and entertainments against which his solid upbringing rebelled mutely.

"Oh, cheer up, John!" she told him with irritating jocularity. "Don't be always a kill-joy. Old Man Gloom!" She pouted.

"I was thinking of my father," he told her.

"Oh, come out of it!" she said, petulantly. As she watched the twinge across his features her voice changed. "Dearest, he's happy! The dead are happy! They don't want us to be dejected over them. They are not selfish, the dead." Had it come from anybody else's mouth it would have comforted him, but somehow already he doubted her sincerity.

In that one month in which he had been married he had aged years. He seemed to understand things that before he had never dreamed of. Bitterly it was brought home to him that she cared for, she reveled in, the things his money bought for her. His mother had left him a little fortune—not much, ten thousand dollars—and he had drawn upon that, and was using it to live on until such time as they went back home and fixed an allowance from his father's estate. Rapidly that money was flowing away in his bride's gluttonous, tinsel ambitions. The desire to spend came on her like a drunkenness and took strange, grotesque forms. On one day she would deck herself with a rhinestone brooch from a department store that shrieked aloud its very cheapness against the somber lines of a Joseph masterpiece.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

She would wear a bronze Celtic torque on a shoddy, exaggerated costume from Sixth Avenue. He had no knowledge of women's apparel, had young John Keogh, but he knew instinctively from his associations with his sister that this was wrong. With her high-laced boots and her short skirts, with her flimsy blouses and her small, impudent hats, she gave the impression of a showy manicurist, or a down-town cloak model, or a courtezan of the cheap sort. The loungers on Broadway hailed her with mute acclaim, classifying her, in their amusingly vulgar phrase, as "chicken."

"Derry will fix her, though," John consoled himself.

She would have to learn things he knew. Of course, it was not her fault. Her upbringing, he thought to himself, did not help her to understand things. Her cloistered innocence. . . . He thought of two occasions. He had brought her to see a series of dances by Adolph Bohm and his associates. She had flushed at the splendid semi-nudity of the artists.

"The police oughtn't to allow it." She had colored indignantly. And yet in a famous Broadway cabaret, toward morning, she had watched a young and pretty Jewess one-stepping in the crowd with a bald-headed, fox-eyed, wide-girthed man. They were dancing with patent wantonness. John had turned away with a look of repulsion.

"What's wrong with you now?" she had asked, sarcastically. Poor innocent little kid! he thought.

By and large he was happy with her. It was only at various moments that a keen-edged intuition

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

stabbed him like a knife. He put the sense of misfortune from him as an unworthy thought.

She loved him, he thought, and while she did that there was no danger of her losing her head. At times, when he was alone, treading the gray pavements, there would come to him the memory of her beauty and abandon. That shimmer of red hair, falling hip-low—like the golden cloak of some Irish queen swinging into battle; those sea-green eyes, now clouded like the coming of dawn, now bright like dawn's scintillating; the warm, half-open lips, soft and perfumed, like the heart of a rose; her pulsing throat; her slight white figure, like a marble of ancient Greece; her half-articulate voice—all these he remembered with dumb awe. She loved him, he was certain, body and soul. He was not old enough to conjecture whether that was for him personally or whether it was a thing apart, a free element out of reaction, temperamental—whether, with another man . . .

And so for a month and more this went on. More and more she became drunken with the surety of money, with a sense of position as with a heady wine. She lost perspective. She lost sometimes her steady cunning. There was the occasion when John was going to bring to dinner a great golf professional he had spoken of to her.

"If Dave had only been trained to carefulness he would beat the world," he had told her, enthusiastically. "As it is he plays the most marvelous golf in the country, and then throws away the game on the putting-green. He won the amateur championship of Scotland at twenty. What ruined him was

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

going to Canada. He worked at his trade there—he's a carpenter. Queer, isn't it? He never touched a club for five years. . . ."

About a week later he suggested bringing Dave to dinner. She turned on him in a sort of fury.

"You want me to have dinner with a common carpenter?" she shrilled, in a voice reminiscent of her mother's.

"Jean! Jean!" He looked at her aghast. She was quick enough to see her mistake and to turn it.

"You're throwing my humble origin up at me." She started sobbing. "You want to insult me. I knew you would do that. I knew it. I knew it all along." It took him hours to make peace with her.

He had had a letter from Derith, an honest, affectionate letter that moved him by its dumb reproach and sisterly trustfulness. "Why didn't you tell me, Johnny boy?" she wrote. "You know I never have stood in your way. And we never had a secret from each other before. Now come home and make your peace, and bring my new sister home with you. There's nothing I sha'n't do to make her welcome, to put her at her ease. And besides—" She went into her plans for the works, explained to him her ideas of the co-operation needed between the owner and the yards. "There's a power of work," she wrote, "enough to keep us both and Angus busy for a lifetime." He showed his wife the letter.

"We'd better be going," he said. "It really is high time for me to turn in and help at the works."

"What do you want to work for?" she asked. "The place is worth millions. You needn't work."

"We've all got to do something."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"So you are going to bury me right in that little town, are you?" she said, in dangerously edged accents. "I'm not good enough to take around. I spend all my life repressed, poverty-stricken, down-trodden in that hole, and the first thing I'm told, now that I'm married, is that I've got to go back."

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to have a good time like other women. You've got the means. Why shouldn't I? You can have a yacht. You can bring me to Palm Beach. I want to go there," she exclaimed, vehemently. "I tell you I want to!"

"Derith—" he began.

"It's all very well for your sister to talk," she rebutted. "She's had everything since she was that high." She put her hand to the level of her knee. "I've had nothing. She was at college, at dances, at everything. She had young men. I was cheated. I want it now. I didn't marry your sister."

"You'll have to come back," he said, with an idea of showing his strength to her. It was not always right, he had been told, to give in to women. They didn't respect a man. . . . She burst into a torrent of tears and in five minutes she had him vanquished.

All this petulance, all this moodiness, he could not understand. Changed she seemed to be, grotesquely changed since the day he had married her. And as he pondered over her there came a dim, misty word he had heard or had read somewhere. Naturally, logically, marriage meant children, and with the physiological change there was also a mental one, a time when women were not themselves, as the phrase

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

went. A great wave of tenderness flowed about him, and he felt abashed.

"You're feeling all right?" he asked, anxiously, blushing.

"What do you mean?"

"You're not ill, are you?" His face was burning and there was a dinning in his ears. "You're not . . . You're not going to be—?"

"I'm not caught, if that's what you mean," she laughed. "Don't worry. I'm not, and I won't be."

The utter, cynical, immodest vulgarity of the tone and phrase sent him reeling as a boxer might reel before a stunning counter to the point.

CHAPTER VI

I

THE room that had been her father's, Shane Butler Keogh's, at the shipyards had undergone a subtle change. It still remained in its chief points the same, but Derith had somehow modified it. Above the mantel over the fireplace a portrait of the founder, brought from the residence, looked haughtily about, with its air of who-are-you-and-what-the-blazes-do-you-want? Over the floor of the mellow old room a broad rug spread in soft yellows and subtle greens. A great Florentine oak table, bare except for a vase of spring flowers, replaced the old man's sturdy working-desk. Beside the table was a Spanish sea-chest. The room gave the same impression of solid ease, but there was a faint and delicate aroma of gentler personality. In her father's place Derith sat, looking mannishly exotic in her tailored blue skirt, her severe linen blouse, her black stock—a clumsy disguise for her slim, gracious lines. Her face was stamped with the mold of her father's, high-spirited, well-bred. But where her father's eyes would have been searching and just hers were enthusiastic and very gentle. At one end of the table sat Adair, the assistant manager, a thin, weedy man with a straggling mustache and a blue eye, impor-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

tant, anemic, as though he were fed on his own ink and paper. At the other end sat Angus Campbell, browned, muscular, with his second-mate's look on his face as he gazed at the workers' committee. "One wrong crack out of you, my men," his eyes and jaw seemed to say, "and you'll be carried out on a door. Now we understand one another; let's get to business." Derith was smiling at the delegation—Jerome Bonaparte Jones, the gigantic negro with the abashed smile, who had last week won the world's riveting championship from the Pride of Belfast; Weldon, of the office force, middle-aged, typically clerical, a man who bred hens; McKinstry, the fitter, the sandy-haired socialist, whose eyes spewed green hate.

She spoke in what she thought was a crisp, business-like voice. It resembled a quickened rhythm on the *viola d'amore*.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Campbell has suggested that the works be put on a new efficiency basis—on what is termed a basis of scientific management. I presume you know what that means. Each man will be rewarded according to his efficiency. Each man has open to him, as soon as he deserves it, a position as first-class workman. A fair field and no favor, as they say in sporting parlance. The good man is not penalized by the weight of the incompetent worker. By and large it increases wages, increases the employment of labor, democratizes industry, and makes the old and cumbersome trade-unionism unnecessary. Am I right, Mr. Campbell?"

"In the main, yes." Campbell's eyes were still fixed on the men.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"And still," Derith went on, "I am told there is a bitter feeling against it. Now I want to be fair to everybody. I am not in this business to make a fortune. Of course, I am not in it to squander one, either. But I want us all to be satisfied on a basis of justice and amicable dealing. Now, what do you say. You, Weldon, speak up."

"Anything you say, miss," the clerk responded, with a respectful simper. Derith looked at him contemptuously.

"You're hardly the man for a representative delegation, are you? You tell me, Jones, and tell me straightly. I want to know."

"Well, miss"—the gigantic black riveter shuffled embarrassedly—"I don't like it."

"Good man! Now why?"

"Well, it's this way. Under scientific management I get more. The man beside me may get only half what I do. The man beside me may be twenty years older. He may be father of a family, with seven or eight children. I shoot my wages away in craps, perhaps, let's say, and he needs all he gets for bread and a lot more. There's thousands like that. Like me there's one or two—a dozen. It isn't scientific, perhaps, but it's God's truth!"

"And yet, Jones," Derith went on, "look at what you could make. The record you put up against Johnson of Belfast!"

"That was a sporting proposition, Miss Derith," the champion replied. "Everybody was proud of me then, but if I do that by piece-work, every one calls me a black son-of-a-gun and says I take the bread out of their mouths—"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"But, Jones, you don't see it entirely," Angus broke in.

"I mayn't see it entirely, Mr. Campbell, sir," Jones interrupted in turn. "But I sees this: I stick by my gang!"

"What do you say, McKinstry?" she asked the dour socialist.

"I say this, madam," came in acid tones. "If you want to put in a system of sweating that's worse than the New York Yiddish tailors', put in your scientific management. You can weed out the poor and broken worker and toss him aside with your speeders and your pacers and your record stunts. It looks fine and it sounds fine, and it is fine for ye. Ye got a great weapon there against your men—"

"Look out, McKinstry," Campbell's voice snapped out threateningly.

"Angus!" She turned to him reproachfully. "McKinstry, won't you believe that I'm not looking for a weapon against the workers? Believe me, I want them to have amicable relations with me and solid comfort for themselves. Can't you see that?"

"Maybe."

"So help me God"—Campbell had sprung up threateningly—"so help me God, I'll strangle you where you stand, McKinstry!"

The socialist looked him square in the eye.

"You've ay been a fair man, Mr. Campbell," he replied. "You've ay been a just man, according to your lights. But one thing you can't change, and that is conflict between labor and capital. There's always been war, and there always will be, and no love lost. No amount of your scientific terms and no amount

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of your philosophy can change that. We've got no time for science or philosophy. We've got to earn our daily bread, and to watch out at the same time that ye put nothing over on us. Ah, ye may gnash your teeth and believe different, but you're a fool if you do. It's war."

"It's not war where I'm concerned, McKinstry," Derith said, gently. "That's what I'm trying to do—to put things on a different basis, to wipe away the old régime that obtained everywhere and be the pioneer of a new era, when laborer and employer join together to take their rightful places in civilization. I am earnest, and I want you to believe so. And as proof of my belief, as a warrant of friendliness, I am acceding to the views of yourself and of Jones here," she smiled at the riveter, whose face was troubled by McKinstry's outburst, "and deciding to drop the plan for a basis of so-called scientific management in the yards."

II

She was alone now; the committee of workmen had gone and the manager had returned to his office, had gone off a little impatiently about his affairs. Poor Angus! she thought, square as any man can be square, reliable as a rock, but so limited in vision. "Let me handle this," he had asked her. "Damn it all, Derry," he had exploded, "what do you know about it?"

She knew nothing about it, she granted, but that was her strength. He and his like were blinded by the prejudices accumulated in their work. They labored so close to the ground that they could not

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

see the sun by whose benign rays they were lighted. Unhampered by prejudice, she understood and distinguished the right from the wrong of things. And, besides, there were her father's instructions.

She moved over to the window, and as she looked out, past the giant cradles and the forest of ironwork, away past the gleaming water where the gulls hovered, the edifice of her imagination rose, foundation and wall, gable, turret, and casement, in glorious clear design. Man, it had been nobly phrased, was entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—worker, merchant, and overlord. The power of the world, whose tokens were disks of yellow metal, was to be applied to this one principle. The men in the shops earned theirs by right of the labor that was life itself. The officers of the yards gained theirs from merchandizing the output of the men. All this fabric was intelligible. There were differences in gains, to be sure, but so long as the power was honestly accumulated there could be no objection to that. It was beyond human power to regulate good and ill chance. Differences in ability, too, the dower at birth, that could not be helped, nor should it be. "It takes all kinds of people to make a world," went the shrewd platitude. That was true! There could be no progress in monotony.

"All that is clear," she thought, "but what of me and my kind?"

Her father, and thousands of fathers like him, had builded up a fortune, and had enjoyed the fruits of their labor. Her father had a right, as one of the rewards of his labor and ability, to bring up his children in a degree of comfort and to endow them with

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

education. And then a man died and his wealth was left behind him to his children, most often, and the children were left to their own devices as to the stewardship of the wealth. What of them?

In this wisely built society of hers she could see few of her like who would look at the matter from her point of view, and see the responsibility of the stewardship. There were friends of hers to whom the legacy of money had been a curse. There was Perry Nicholson, the son of the Maine spruce magnate, whose million and a half was being riotously squandered in the drinking-kens of America. Apart from the evil wrought on his own personality, was it right that this power, generated and tended by the labor of thousands of skilled workmen and the foresight and acumen of a great leader, should be scattered among vice-mongers? But he would plead that it was his money to do what he liked with. Was that true? She felt it was not. There was her old friend, Charity Boyd, who had been with her at Bryn Mawr, the recipient of the great Boyd chocolate fortune, who had married a great French nobleman, a near-Bourbon, and whose fortune was, doubtless, going to the rehabilitation of a family great in feudal days. Was that right? She confessed she didn't know.

"But I know for myself," she thought. And in her mind's eye she saw in her hands the Keogh millions as a fine and beneficent thing, upholding great ideals, benefiting thousands, of service to the nation. Enough for her to be the channel through which it flowed, a pattern of employers. She saw it drip on the arid, thirsty ground of labor like a gentle spring

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

rain. Better than the empty ambition of useless wealth, better than a great name, better than anything—she could see it, she could understand. It was all so simple.

There came across her dreaming a faint shadow. John! John and his wife! What were they going to do with their lives, with John's money? John? There could be no doubt of John's seeing what she saw, if it were just pointed out to him. John's wife? Angus had said she was a fortune-grabber, but Angus was suspicious, incredulous, for all his justice and honesty. She could not believe that of any woman. It was impossible. Such things did not exist!

She rustled with sudden design. Of course, John's wife, the poor child! was blinded a little in going out of the darkness of poverty into the sunlight of money and comfort. The girl was knocking against obstacles, unsure of her way. She would go down and take a hand and explain matters to her, and keep her feet straight until her eyes saw fairly and until she was certain of the path. . . .

III

The Hunts Point Bum was watching McKinstry with eager interest in his eyes—and behind that there was still something, as behind the glow in a stained-glass window is the white light that furnishes the color.

“—and I up and says to her,” McKinstry was narrating, “that there could be no truce between labor and capital, nothing but war.”

“Go on, comrade.” Trevelyan turned to the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

others present in the labor-union rooms. From old Krischenko the Russian, shaggy, long-fingered, eternally lighting cigarettes, there passed a silent message of amusement.

"And with that she gave in," the socialist continued. "She said she wished to show us her feeling toward the working-men was not one of war, and as an earnest of that she would drop the question of scientific management."

"What are you going to do now, comrade?" Trevelyan suggested.

"We have won," McKinstry answered.

"You have won," the Bum agreed. There crept into his voice the exalted, hypnotic rhythm. "You have won a small skirmish where a great victory is possible. If she gives in in small things she will give in in large ones. Now is your time to strike for your maximum wage, your minimum hours, to put in practice the principle you have held so long, that everything the worker does is the worker's own. You have it all before you. You have only to take it in your hand."

"But in socialism we do not go so far," McKinstry objected. "The employer receives a fair price for the direction and the use of his instruments—"

"To hell with socialism!" Trevelyan's voice broke in. "Haven't I told you enough of the upholders of socialism? The anemic professors and the pettifogging Jewish lawyers, the nickel poets and the neurotic women. We deal in facts, not theories. You said it was war and war it is. And look you, comrade, here is this man Keogh dead, and his treasure of money, the weapon by which he forced you

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

down, in the hands of his daughter, an incompetent guard. Capture it as you would an inimical outpost. Divide it as you would loot of battle. For it is spoils of war, of the holy war you wage with your comrades against inequality and oppression. It is yours!"

"That is true," McKinstry agreed.

"Go out now and spread the news among your comrades. Help Dolan, who is already among them. You have won the first victory. Are you afraid of another?"

Krischenko smiled as the fitter went off aglow with Trevelyan's words.

"You are doing a very clever thing," he nodded in appreciation, "cleverer than your work in the West. You are teaching the common barn-yard fowl how to loot."

The Hunts Point Bum grinned cynically. The Russian rolled himself another cigarette.

"You are like a hawk, my young friend, only a very clever hawk. You teach the chickens how to fatten themselves, and then you will swoop down on them with your own designs." He licked the gum selvage of the paper. "Clever, too clever . . . too damned clever . . . to live long."

"Who's going to end me?" Trevelyan smiled.

"The master of the barn-yard," Krischenko puffed, "is sometimes as quick and as clever as the hawk. The master of the barn-yard, Miss Keogh and her man, Angus Campbell."

CHAPTER VII

HER brother was out, she was told at the desk of the hotel, but Mrs. Keogh was in. And Derith was glad to hear it. It would be easier for her to get to know her brother's wife when John was away. "Don't mind announcing me. I'll go up," she told the clerk, and because they knew her in the hotel, from her father's visit there, they were glad to admit her. She left the elevator and followed the bell-boy. He stopped in front of a door and knocked.

"... he used to give me a five-dollar bill every time he came in," she could hear a cheap New York voice going, "and then one day he asked me to go off on a week-end party with him. 'You forget,' I says, 'I'm a married woman.' 'I'm married, too,' he says. 'Ain't you just the old sport?' I says to him, just like that—"

"Come in," came a different voice, at the third knocking.

Jean was lying back in a huge armchair, fingers dipping in a big box of chocolates, while a buxom, black-haired manicurist was buffing her nails.

"I'm John's sister," Derith explained.

"Oh, won't you come in?" Jean rose languorously. "You can go now," she told the manicure girl, with great hauteur. The manicurist gathered up her instruments, sniffed, and departed.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Derith moved across with that spontaneity of hers that was so characteristic, her hands outstretched in greeting, her eyes glowing, and as she moved she felt somehow that a cold, an inimical, air was blowing toward her and about her was an atmosphere charged with malignancy. Intuitively she felt that the room was wrong, the air was wrong, the woman wrong, as one might feel about an object that it had a wrong and evil shape. She had meant to kiss the young girl, but she was met with a handshake high as a barricade.

"So you are my new sister!"

"I am your brother John's wife!" There was a note of defiance in her tones, and the green eyes looked steadily, icily at Derith's soft gray ones.

There was a silence, and all the time there was brought home to the unmarried woman the feeling somehow that all was wrong. This room, too, magnificent with the stereotyped, somewhat sordid magnificence of hotels, permeated with an acrid, aphrodisiac essence; this woman posturing in undergarments and a wrapper of lace, groomed like a mare, her eyebrows trained, her hands gleaming—all these affronted her virginity. With a catch in her throat she thought of John, her buddy John, John the baby; John the clean, simple athlete. It was wrong for him, it was dangerous for him. Why, this was the way, going down to the chambers of death . . .

All these things flashed through her mind, like the rapid clicking of a cinema device, like the drumming of a racing horse's hoofs. Only the fraction of an instant it took, but it seemed to her that she and this other woman were standing there for ages, in

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

strained, strange, theatrical postures, like mummers in some movie play.

"Do you intend staying here long?" Jean asked.

"This is silly. I'm imagining these things," Derith told herself. She summoned her bonny smile. "Not for long. I've come down to take you and John home."

"I'm afraid," Jean smiled acridly, "that doesn't fit in with our plans."

"I don't understand." Derith was at sea.

"John and I are going to Virginia Hot Springs. After that we may spend the winter in Florida, or southern California, I haven't decided which yet. Perhaps," she slipped in, maliciously, "we'll have a week to spare in early summer. We'll run up then."

"But John has got to work," Derith observed, dazedly.

"I wasn't aware of that." Jean's gage of battle was thrown. "I think John has enough money to live as a gentleman."

"But don't you see—"

"I see nothing," Jean's voice rose shrilly, "except that you are continually meddling with affairs that concern only myself and my husband. I'm able to manage my husband without your assistance, and I'll thank you to keep your hand out of what concerns us alone. Will you please stop writing to him and nagging him about work and coming home—"

"You don't understand—" Derith began, soothingly.

"I understand this, all right"—she advanced on Derith, her arms akimbo, her head shaking—"that I'll have no interference from any of John's rela-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

tives in my affairs." Her eyes were savage. They gleamed suddenly. She went to the door and pressed a bell.

"The last thing in the world I'm trying to do is to interfere."

"You are trying to interfere. Oh, I know your type, all right. Just because you haven't been able to get a husband and I have, you're green with jealousy. You can't bear to see anybody happy except yourself. Perhaps you're afraid that I'll spend too much of the money." She laughed a vulgar, threatening laugh. "I'll spend it, all right. You can go home and attend to the factory. I'll see to the spending end of it—"

There was a knock at the door. A maid came in. Jean's attitude became yawningly nonchalant.

"Oh, Mary," she drawled, "show this person out."

Derith gasped, and on top of that came a well-nigh uncontrollable desire to laugh, so grotesque was the situation, so childish. She picked up her gloves and purse and went out, under the indignant, sympathetic eyes of the red-cheeked Irish maid.

"I'm sorry, miss. She don't know no better."

"It's nothing." Derith smiled. It was incredibly childish, incredibly vulgar—a thing to laugh at. And yet behind that, in the room, in the atmosphere, in the woman herself, there was something horribly maleficent? There sprang to her mind without warning the terrible allusion of Solomon to the strange woman, who is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her home. . . .

Poor John! Poor buddy John!

CHAPTER VIII

I

THE more Angus Campbell thought over the increasing demands of the working-men of the yards the more convinced he became that it was not a case of communal petulance. There was something behind it, he felt.

First there had been the whispering revolution against the installing of an efficiency system. Derith had given way on that. Then came the demand for the dropping of the pace-makers, bolstered by a sentimental plea whose superficial pathos had more appeal for a woman than had the deep, underlying economic truths in rebuttal. This last demand, the installing of a system of old-age pensions and a system of profit-sharing, rang with the force of an order. Derith, unless he was very careful, would give way on both of them—would give way on all points, indeed, until a certain limit was reached, and then would come disaster. Their demands, like some sharp instrument, would pierce easily down through the gentle, womanly streak in her nature; they would go farther still, through a certain patience, and then they would come suddenly on the iron spirit of her father. They would bite into that only to have their edge turned, like a defective knife. Oh yes, disaster would come. That was certain; an assured thing!

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Clearly enough he saw what Derith felt about the matter of inherited wealth. The right of inheritance, that was no right at all. But lacking a different scheme of control—a scheme in which all material things at a man's death reverted to the community, and that was a dreamer's vision, no matter how just—what else was there? Himself, he felt, had as good a right to the money as she or John, but what right was that? He put this question aside for the moment and he looked at the whole affair impersonally. There was Shane Keogh's legacy, a golden, benign thing, honestly won, destined for beneficent uses. There were the trustees of that fortune, Derith Keogh and her brother John. There was himself, a sort of guardian, an armed sentry at the treasure-house. But aside, too, for the moment, the question of the distribution, right or wrong, of that money. A fact that was evident to him that, little by little, that treasure was being preyed upon, nibbled. In a while there would be daring, swooping theft. Later, red pillage.

All these things he pondered over as he sat by the lamp-lit table in his room in Genesis Street, smoking his short brier pipe before the fire. Derith had gone to New York to meet John's wife and to bring them both home—there was little hope for that, Campbell sensed. Eventually something would happen between John and his wife that would sever them, that he felt, but not yet. In the shipyard two new orders had been received, one for the flag-ship of the Virgin line, a twelve-thousand-ton boat to ply between the West Indies and New York, and another for three freight-ships of the new concrete type.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Before work was begun on these he wanted to have out this question of old-age pensions for the workmen and finish the profit-sharing question. Derith must settle these on her return. There was a fight on hand.

He remembered queerly, from the reading of his sailor days, on the long voyages when he devoured everything from the *Republic* of Plato to the novels of the Reverend Harold Bell Wright, an allusion in one of the Greek historians, Diodorus Siculus, or in the geography johnny—what was his name? Strabo—an allusion to gold. There was a treasure of it in India, it went somehow, guarded by a griffin, and one-eyed men were continually attempting to steal it. The thought brought home to him his position of trust, and he envisioned himself a thing of claws and metallic wings, crouching over the piled-up pieces of Shane Butler Keogh's, while in the dark a sneaking tribe, of matted hair, of one baleful eye, crept up in the dark nefariously, under a cunning leader.

"There's some one behind all this," he thought. He rose in decision. "I'll go to Johnson, the master stevedores' head, and talk it over." He knocked his pipe out on the heel of his boot and reached for his hat.

High in the air the griffin rose, searching, poised like a hawk, with a flutter of brazen wings. . . .

II

"I've always been straight with you and your men, Johnson." Campbell was leaning across an immacu-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

late kitchen-table, his jaw thrust out, his eyes hard.
“Tell me, is this fair?”

Johnson was a big, rangy, disappointed-looking sort of man, with a drooping black mustache such as is associated with a Western bandit.

“It’s going a bit far, Mr. Campbell.”

“Now who’s behind it? It’s not McKinstry.”

“No, he hasn’t head enough.”

“Nor Morel, that dirty little Austrian?”

“Nor Morel.”

“Is it Krischenko, the anarchist?”

“He hasn’t enough influence.”

“Is it Dolan, the hired agitator?”

“He might be the tongue. He’s not the head.”

“Then, in hell’s name, who is the head?”

Johnson looked carefully about the room. He rose and opened and again closed the door.

“There’s some one you’ve not mentioned,” he hinted. “John Trevelyan, the one they call the Hunts Point Bum.”

CHAPTER IX

I

SHE had come back to New River with a queer sensation in her bosom, a sense of empty oppression. Before she had gone to New York all had seemed so clear to her; her dream had gone before her like a hurrying cloud, and she had felt certain it would be evident to all. Five minutes' talking to a selfish woman and an atmosphere had crept about her, like tentacular mists, obscuring her vision, sapping her reliance, diluting her energy. And she had felt somehow that for a long time she had said good-by to John.

He had come racing over to Murray Hill when he heard from his wife she was in town. He had entered bravely, with a jocose word on his lips, but he had changed. The great athletic body seemed to have slumped a little, and there was no spring to the feet, and in the eyes there was a something, a something reminiscent of a dumb animal that had been undeservedly hurt.

"So you came to town, Derry—you came to town after the prodigal brother."

"Indeed no!" she exclaimed, indignant. And there and then a silence came between them. They had both decided to carry off matters with an air

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of nothing wrong, of humorous casualty. But they couldn't. They were flesh of one flesh and spirit of one spirit. They had been close, so close. Everything had been as one to them. And now it was impossible to separate them.

"I'm sorry, Derry." He slumped suddenly.

"Listen, John," she whispered, fiercely; "it's all right." She felt angry at the tears in her eyes. "It will all come right in the end. It's all right, darling. She's just young, just a little foolish. I don't mind what she said to me. It will all come right."

"Do you think so, Derry? Do you think so?"

"I know it," she lied, bravely. "I know it."

Without a word he got up. There was a smiling agony in his eyes.

"I must go now," he said.

She understood, and it was all she could do not to cry on his shoulder. To think that things should have come to this: that her brother dared not stay with her, for fear of bringing down on his head the smarting, objurgative anger of a woman who to both of them was all but a stranger.

"Jack, I've got to get back, anyway. I take the boat up to-night. It will be all right, dear—it will be all right."

As he went off she had somehow the feeling that she was bidding good-by to a prisoner who was returning to the drear loneliness of a cell. . . .

She had spoken to Angus of it, withholding nothing.

"Think of it, Angus, our buddy John! Isn't there anything we can do?—you can do?"

"If killing myself would help you and John,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Derry, I'd do it this minute," he had told her.
"There's nothing we can do."

"But we can't have him spend his life with a woman like that."

"He won't." Angus shook his head. "It's too ill adjusted to last long. It will solve itself."

"I wish I felt so," she, now incredulous, murmured.

She had come back eager to plunge herself into work, to settle once and for all certain disputes with Angus—the question of those old-age pensions and to fix a scheme for profit-sharing, but a letter lay before her from her aunt Myra on Long Island—her mother's sister, she who had married Hendricks the banker. "I want you to come at once," the old woman had written. "My dear niece, I am troubled." A queer letter, no queerer than the woman herself, but, somehow, disconcerting; the ink and paper breathed an atmosphere of hurried decision. "I will tell you when you come—I can't now," went the firm, angular writing, with its many dashes.

Derith went over the cryptic, rustling half-sheet, and a sense of foreboding seized her. Her aunt Myra, with her strange religious beliefs of the Orient which were all her life to her, now that her husband had died, was not the woman to worry over anything. She was possessed of a terrible peace.

"It's only to acquaint me with some decision of the laws of Karma," Derith laughed. She grew ashamed of her levity. "I will go down and see her to-morrow," she decided. "Poor old girl!"

But she never saw her aunt alive again, for that night Myra Hendricks died.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

II

I can remember pointing out the figure of Junius Hendricks to a friend of mine, a Scots sportsman. "That's Junius Hendricks—the Bank of the New Amsterdam Company, you know." I can remember his gasp of incredulity, "Well, I'm bunkered!"—as indeed he might well be.

A small man, about five feet four, spare, with dull-gray eyes protected by glasses worn on a chain, with a short-cropped, gray mustache, a face ruddy, marked like a robin's egg with faint intricate red veins, a slight hump to his back, and a manner suggesting the snapping courage of a small dog, he gave the impression of an insurance agent of a minor territory—a suburban sort of person, with an umbrella, who might reasonably be supposed to read *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*—not at all what one would imagine a successful banker to look like.

But if he seemed negligible, by the Lord Harry! his wife did not. Tall as a grenadier, buxom to an unheard-of point, a woman with a gigantic bosom and terrifying hips, Myra Hendricks would sail into a room like a frigate of ancient days. For all her frame, the frame of a fattened Amazon, there was nothing sloppy about her—all bowsed taut, ship-shape, and Bristol fashion. One could never forget that figure, dressed now in green, now in purple, with a quantity of beads; nor that startlingly regular, pretty face; nor those snapping brown eyes that looked at you as though you were a new and rather shameful sort of crook; and the biggest heart in America.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

And yet people misunderstood her, or did not want to understand, or twisted their opinions against her. She was so frank sometimes that she hurt. "I've got no liking for hypocrites," she would state outright to another woman's face. She had many other dislikes, including afternoon dancing and cocktails for women. "There are light wines for dinner here," she told her women guests in her Long Island home. "If you want cocktails and highballs, there is a bar at the White Horse, kept by a competent landlord. Follow the negro carter." She meant well, naturally, but her manner was unfortunate.

And so a host turned against and ridiculed her. They laughed at her dresses. They laughed at her size. They laughed at her manner of treating her husband. "Hendricks," she would call to him abruptly, with an intonation as of a vessel's captain giving the command, "stand by!" They would laugh at her reference to him: "Hendricks! Surely you know Hendricks. A small man with a high color!" And then Junius Hendricks died, very notably for so modest a man. He interfered with a pugilist who was beating his wife—with a certain degree of right on the husband's side, it was afterward proved. The banker belabored the man with his umbrella, and was laid out neatly from a right-hand smash between the eyes, his skull cracked like the shell of a bird's egg.

And then appeared a strange, grotesque thing, the sort that appears and stuns us when the veil of sanctuary about people's lives is rent or lifted—as we are stunned when we find our golf partner indicted for gainful murder; or that the clergyman's ailment

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

at the private hospital was not appendicitis, when he was rushed off in the night, but delirium tremens; or that the large secret donation to the crippled children's home comes from the wife of a Jewish pawnbroker, a rapacious-looking woman with ghoul's eyes. Myra Hendricks, the large, grotesque, blunt woman, was as much in love with her husband as the veriest school-girl bride with the young athlete of her dreams. It dawned in a glorious resplendent light as some precious stone might glow when its enveloping case was removed. The grotesqueness, the bluntness, fell away from her like an unbecoming garment, and there was nothing left but sheer beauty. She would have none of everybody, nothing of anything.

It was all very pathetic, too, as pathetic as a lost child weeping or a dog's lamenting for a dead master. She wanted him, she wanted nothing but him. Without him life was for her but a dull, gray solitude.

For six months she grieved, and then suddenly there came into her face a look of peace, and it broke on people's ears that Myra Hendricks had gone queer. She was continually in a society that circled around occultism and so-called mysticism as a flight of moths about a lamp. Her acquaintances thought it strange for a while, and then she dropped out of their lives.

They would only have laughed at her if they knew what she was doing, as, indeed, any sensible person might. In fear and trembling and with a certain sense of shame she had crept one evening to a spiritualistic séance, where she was put, as she was told, in communion with her husband. She came again and again, and new and incredible experi-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

ments were made, which she, poor lady! for all her worldly wisdom, swallowed unquestioningly. And there ran the rounds of the whole fraternity of ghouls the word that a new victim was exhumed for a banquet.

They came about her, quack, fakir, charlatan, buzzing like fat, bloated flies. Yogi adepts, swamis, every sort of person of faint color and calm brown eyes crept pussy-footed toward her, with overwise smiles and gentle tolerance for her suspicions, and in slow, hypnotic voices they charmed her with a farrago of mysticism, as fouling as barnacles on the keel of a ship, as tenacious as a web about a fly. They told her of esoteric meanings in Vedas and Upanishads, and conversed of astral bodies in as matter-of-fact a manner as they might speak of coins in the pocketbook. They talked of the seven planes of being and how karma operates on all of them. They taught her to repeat the sacred Sanskrit affirmation of Being, Buddham, Saranam Gatcham! . . . And twice a month they took her checks.

There was at first a certain Swami Ramanjananda, a fat man in a gray cashmere robe and flexible white kid boots. There was a Sister Prakemata, an acidulous woman with bad eyes. Then last of all came Doctor Otoman, Prince of Advshl Ha'nish, prophet of the Sun God, Prince of Peace, Manthra Magus of Temple El-Katman; Kalantar of Zoroastrian breathing and Envoy of Mazdaznan living, Viceroy-elect and International Head of Master-Thot. And under his incumbency Myra Hendricks died.

And she lay very quiet with a new expression of peace on her face, a human peace, as though she

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

had discovered that beyond the clangor of the portals of death was not a bleak region of adipose negroid gods, of slightly obscene rites and involuted whorling thought, but a clean and happy place of sunshine and flowers and singing birds, where Junius Hendricks had put on the radiance of an Easter morning. . . .

And on the peaceful face was a quirking shadow when Derith came.

III

She telegraphed to Angus Campbell to come help her at once, for she did not like the atmosphere of the house. Her aunt had surrounded herself, or had been surrounded, by queer foreigners, Hindus, Brahmins, what not, brown people with sly, secretive eyes. They moved about the corridors like faint shadows. The only one she spoke to was Doctor Otoman, the Prince of Advshl Ha'nish.

"I want you to understand straight away," she said to him, "that there are to be no heathen observances here. My aunt is going to be buried in a fitting Christian manner."

The fair Teuton, in grotesque yellow, put out his hands.

"I have no objections," he said. "There is truth in all religions." Now that the poor lady was dead he had no further interest, except to be around in a queer, proprietary sort of way. . . .

"I don't like it, Angus," she told Campbell.

"Let's have him in," Campbell said, crisply. He sat down in front of a desk in the library and had her sit beside him. They sent for the adept.

"Now, my man," Campbell leaned forward,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Miss Keogh feels that your presence here is not in keeping with the solemnity of a Christian funeral. She'd feel mightily obliged if you'd just collect your troupe and fade away."

"I'm afraid that's impossible." The doctor smiled with a malicious triumph. "I'm Mrs. Hendricks's heir."

"Come again!" Campbell snapped.

"Sister Sismata, Mrs. Hendricks, has bequeathed her money to me for the founding of a temple and university for the study and practice of occult wisdom, where I may prepare for my second coming as the incarnation of Jesus the Christ."

Campbell took from his pocket the last letter of Myra Hendricks. He pointed toward Derith.

"Your aunt has left this man her money, Derry. What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," she said. "I can't do anything, can I?"

"Can't you! Before I'd let this gang get away with the money your uncle spent his life in making I'd scoop them into the junk-heap. Look at that letter. It's patent on the face of it what she meant. Fight him. You don't need the money. But don't let him get it."

"The law—" the mystic burst in.

"The law!" Angus laughed. "Why, there's not a white judge and jury in America would let you get away with it—you and your bunch of colored parasites, coming over here and preying on the tragedies of women! Law! By God! you'll get law all right!"

The doctor was glancing maliciously at Campbell. He smiled suddenly.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Might I speak to Miss Keogh alone a moment?"

"All right. Hear what he has to say, Derith."

Campbell walked out and closed the door behind him.

"You know, Miss Keogh," he smiled, "it might be injudicious to begin proceedings in the matter. Conventions are easily shocked. I might be able to show that there were other reasons for bequeathing this legacy. Sister Sismata was a widow, and a certain amount of, as it were, intimacy—"

Derith walked to the door unhesitatingly. She flung it open.

"Angus!" she called. "Angus Campbell! Come and smash this man's mouth!"

CHAPTER X

I

THE Hunts Point Bum faced the few hundred gathered in the small meeting-room. His hands sawed the air in short staccato gestures. His voice punched brazenly.

“. . . and they cry peace when there is no peace, the paid logothetes, the shufflers of words. Abroad through the land your cause is misbranded. The journals of the time, battening on capitalist advertising, misrepresent you. From the pulpit clerics, preaching not by the grace of God, but by the permission of wealthy vestrymen, point you out as Ishmael, the unhallowed one. You are the dissatisfied one. It is you who will not enter into the comity of concord designed by the Prince of Peace.

“Where is this peace, my comrades? Is it peace when at a gun’s point strikers are cowed? When brutal and licentious janissaries assault the pickets at their post? In a physical war on the field of battle they follow set conventions—conventions of civilization. They poison no wells. But against you there are none of these conventions. What of the fetid air you breathe in sweated rooms? In war there is no longer looting, no longer a display of booty wrenched brutally from pleading, piteous

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

hands. And yet—what are their splendid yachts, their porticoed houses, but booty from you and yours? Their rich and gaudy raiment, their gold and jewels, shame the loot of Tatar hordes. And they say there is no war, but a Christian civilization which you will not uphold!"

They had heard these things before, but somehow in the trenchant, clear-cut tones with their powerful vibration they seemed oracular. On the little platform in the hushed room the exaltation of Trevelyan's face threw some strange spell over them. His eyes were burning like a prophet's. His black hair was thrust back from his forehead.

"They have made Christ a revelation against you, an advocate inimical to your cause. Christ, the down-trodden One, the abused and the poor! They were wrong, comrades. I see Him above you tonight. I see His suffering face, His outstretched crucified hands. . . ."

He paused a moment. There was not a sound in that room, not even the indrawing of a breath. His auditors watched him with faces pale and set as in hypnosis. His right arm circled the air. It shot out suddenly, rigid, like a gun pointing.

"They have quoted Holy Writ against you, the smug, sententious dogs, the men who have money enough to afford righteousness! And now I will open to you an oracle out of the same book. For four hundred and thirty years the chosen people of the Lord were in Egyptian bondage. You remember the task set by the bloated Egyptian king to the children of Israel, 'for there shall be no straw given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks.'

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Listen, comrades, listen and learn. 'And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians . . . and they spoiled the Egyptians!'"

II

They had returned to New River, to the shipyards, Angus and Derith, and they were sitting in her office, under the portrait of Shane Butler Keogh.

"You are going to win this suit hands down, Derry, my girl." Campbell was very serious. "But before you get any more money I want to know what you are going to do with what you have." He pulled a paper from his pocket. "Now here are the proposals that are up to you: first, that old-age pension scheme. That's impossible, as things stand now."

"How is it impossible?"

"There are only about three per cent. of your workmen who have spent their lives in your plant. Only three per cent. who deserve it. The others have been here, there, everywhere. They have spent their lives working for others. It's not up to you to take care of the responsibility of others."

"But when they are old, Angus, they have no money. It's not their fault. They spend their money bringing up children, and at the end of their days their children are bringing up their own children and have no money for the old people."

"I know," Campbell said. "And they should be taken care of, as the government takes care of them in England. That's all right. But across my dead

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

body you put in a blanket scheme for your own workmen. Help out certain cases from your own pocket, but outside that, no!"

She pressed the concealed button beneath the table. She told a stenographer she wanted to see the men. McKinstry, suspicious, sullen, came in. Behind him were three others: Addison, lumbering, hard-jawed, as patently the riveter as though he were wearing gloves and goggles; Hanlon, the fitter's helper, red-mustached, huge-handed; and John Dolan.

"Good morning!" Derith nodded crisply. "I have just been going over some matters with Mr. Campbell here—the matter of old-age pensions for the workmen. Now, as things are, it is impracticable. However, I am perfectly willing to help out, on my own account, any of my old workmen in need. How does that strike you?"

"We don't want charity," McKinstry growled. "We want our rights."

"If you can suggest a workable plan—"

"There must be plans."

"There are not!" Campbell barked.

"The matter of profit-sharing we have not been able to go into yet. I want a feasible scheme, fair for you all. I recognize the justice of the wage-earner's right to a share of the profits. You may depend on me to do the right thing by you." She smiled at them, that quick, bright exhalation of life of hers. They responded sullenly with dour eyes. "Is there anything else?" Dolan stepped forward.

"The heaters and fitters' helpers are not getting what they should."

"How's that?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"The heaters are getting only anywhere from two dollars and fifty cents to three dollars and twenty cents a day, and the fitters' helpers the same."

"I don't see any reason for dissatisfaction with that." Derith looked surprised. "It's higher than the wage at the Moore and Bethlehem plants."

"At the time of the rush period," Dolan cleared his throat huskily, "the government scale, the Macey award, was three dollars and ninety-six cents a day each."

"That award was gotten at the gun's point, my man." Campbell turned on him. "It was a damnable hold-up, and there was no reason for it."

"So you say, Mr. Campbell." He left it there adroitly. "Miss Keogh, it ain't fair. Everything has kept at the price it was, food, clothes, everything, and the wages have gone down."

"You think you are not getting your rights, McKinstry?"

"We sure do," came the prompt answer.

"Well, then," she said, consciously ignoring Campbell's mute rage, "if that is fair, you shall have it. I want you to be satisfied. I want to act fair by you. Is that satisfactory?"

"As far as it goes," McKinstry nodded, and they left the room, a sort of leering triumph in their eyes as they looked sidewise at Campbell, raging, helpless. . . .

III

Campbell walked after them without a word. He entered his own office and took a few turns up and down, his fingers snapping, his breath coming through

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

his nose in short, vicious snorts. He went out suddenly, following the men, and, catching up with them in a corner of the yard, he hailed them.

"Well," he spoke to McKinstry, "you got what you wanted, didn't you?"

"We sure did." The others smiled.

"There was something coming to you that you forgot." He glanced around coolly and picked out Addison, the biggest one. He went up to him, his left hand advanced. His right fist crashed over the riveter's jaw, dropping him like a felled ox. He stepped back.

"Well, what about it?" he asked. They looked at him dazedly.

"Why, hell blast you!" his voice dropped a couple of notes, and still it cut like a whip, "if I had done that a year ago I'd have been carried out on an ambulance. But you're no longer honest, damn you! and you know it. You've got the honesty of a wharf rat, and the backbone of a cuttlefish, and you've got the look of pawnbrokers in your eyes. Why, God damn you for a bunch of lousy vultures!" He spat full in McKinstry's face and walked away unmolested.

IV

The men had left now and Angus had left, and, alone, she walked toward the window and gazed out on the yards, and for the first time since she could remember she had no joy in it. She looked on it as a stranger might look at it, impressed by the polygon of ladder-like construction. She looked at the cranes, nose high, like the snouts of some elongated

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

fish. High in the air cradles swung like the toys of gigantic children, and the bases of the derricks, great wheels, were grotesquely misplaced. A wilderness, one might have said—an edifice stripped by a great wind. And beneath the puzzle of lattice-work the plan of a design, like a hair-comb, the back the ship-ways, the teeth the plank roads leading to them. By each way its railroad line paralleled in glistening rails. Here and there cunningly placed, the shacks of fire-houses, timekeepers' lodges, surgical stations, and everywhere men swarming, swarming like ants.

All this had appeared like a scene from an old mythology, like Vulcan's dim and mighty forge. It had a mystery about it. And it had romance, too, the romance of the ancient shipyards when the proud vessels of Tyre went down to the seas. And something more also. She could never but remember her father going to and fro about it, somehow like Solomon, bearded and magnificent and old. He had been the monarch of this microcosm, and she, too, had felt the shadow of royal things. One day would come when she, too, could go about, governing it, responsible for it, proud of it.

And that day had come now, had lengthened to months and drawn out to a year, and somehow, after all, there was a wrong quality, she knew not where. Not in the work it was doing—her share in building up the merchant marine of her country was notable and big. Not in material profits, for in spite of all her conscientiousness to her laborers a fair share was coming out on the balance-sheet. The attitude of the men—that was somehow changed.

She could remember—oh, eighteen years ago, it

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

must have been—her coming in on her father's hand, a tot of five, fat, dimpled, with her black curly hair, and the men crowding about her as subjects might about a princess royal. She could remember later her breaking a bottle of wine across the bows of the vessel named for her, the *Derith Keogh*, and the loud-throated, brazen acclamations of the shipwrights. She could remember going the rounds of the men when she went off to school, shaking hands with hundreds of them, she sorry to leave them and they sorry to see her go.

And now it was different, very different, she felt in this last year, and she felt disappointed and not a little hurt. As she stood there by the window, she could see herself as in a mirror—a slip of a girl, for all her responsibility. And in a simple equation her life was graphic to her. Her father had brought her up sanely and finely, and the smug pruderies of life did not exist for her. She knew vaguely what she had put away from her in accepting the work. That bonny face of hers with the eye of soft light and fullish under-lip and penciled upper one would never receive soft kisses at the dusk of day. That slim body of hers, like a tall, slim flower, supple as a fine knife, soft as a gosling's breast, would never vibrate to majestic spiritual harmonies, as the divinity of music is evoked on a thing of wood and catgut. Her face had turned from the veils of Isis, and she had put away the ultimate assured mate for an economic wedlock, where her whole interest was the welfare of her thousand workers, as a nun may thrust away the sanity of life for the glorification of a hypothetic spiritual spouse.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

She had given them everything, her life, her finest, her best, things that evoke love and reverence and admiration, and what she was receiving from them was a sly, smiling look, the look cast sheepishly at a light woman.

v

All these things Derith Keogh was doing—of her doing them Angus Campbell approved, of themselves he approved little, if at all. The reception they found drove him to a white molten rage.

It had been years now since he had talked to Shane Keogh and told him that one day he was going to marry his daughter, and every day of those years he still held the same ambition and ideal in his mind. Yet he never said a word to her.

“The day will come,” he told himself, “not tomorrow nor next week, but the day will come.” That in his mind was as assured as an ordained solar eclipse.

He never thought about how he would come for her. He had his own view of life, as healthy and sane and normal as he himself was. There was nothing excitingly exotic about it, no Chinesery of blue and gold hangings and verses dripping with distilled culture. There was nothing morbidly lubricious about it—no network of sexual antagonism and violent explosive reunions. It was sane as the trees and healthy as the sea. Life was to him a path all must follow, a path of good stretches and of occasional flinty patches, a path bordered by dangers here and there as by its length it must be. That was no way for a woman to go alone, he felt in the courage

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

and sane chivalry of him. There must be a sort of protection along it, and that protection he wanted to give Derith Keogh.

There was nothing about Derith Keogh that frightened him. Her inheritance not at all. He would never be a reproachful figure in the background, the husband of a rich wife, a spoiled or nagged appurtenance like a bought dog. Her education and her culture neither. Not for him the rôle of the sturdy, admiring husband who listened rapturously while his wife talked to her audience about the art of little theaters or the poetry of Ezra Pound. Take away from her her money, take away from her her culture, what was she, when all was said and done, but a mate for a man?

So he stripped her to her elementals and there was left that physical covering of hers that he reverenced from her dim and dusky hair to her slim, firm-fingered hands, and that was sanctuary to him, making him to understand the meaning of Paul the Hebrew when he spoke of the body as a temple. Within that he saw the real Derith Keogh, the spirit, the Holy Ghost of the Jewish mystic, and as he thought of her, queer, harmonious vignettes flitted through his mind. He had no words to describe her but the muscular vocabulary of a healthy man. He had not the graphic art of translating his feelings, but she impressed him as a beam of moonlight across the sea would, or the wind amid the murmuring multitude of trees, or the colors of an Egyptian bird. She within herself was a glimmer of soft light, a clear and wonderful odor, a something faintly visible yet apart from material and glowingly un-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

selfish. He saw it shed about her, shed on the workmen, shed on everything. She went forth into battle as Joan the maid did, with a banner as white and a courage as high.

All this he understood and remembered, and though he knew it was impracticable, he loved her the more for it. The day he would go to her side would be the day she would need him, when the white pennant would be torn to shreds and the courage broken. That would inevitably come, an assured, a heartbreak ing thing! And unconsciously now she was going ahead, riding her glorious tourney, which the cause she was riding for called a jousting of fools, laughed at, took advantage of. . . .

His nostrils dilated again with a furious and cold anger as they had only done twice before in his life, and on each occasion he had rightfully killed a man. He rose to go out into the growing night, and the set of his face was as of some angry spirit carved in granite, and the weapon he put in his pocket was blue and squat and sinister, like some deadly reptile.

VI

The first impression of Trevelyan, when he saw the figure in the back room of the saloon where the agitator made his headquarters, was one of kinetic force clothed in flesh. A rugged, muscular face, like something of Rodin's, only less massive. The Hunts Point Bum watched him with interest as he went up to the table, the keen interest of one athlete eying another, not inimical.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I'm Angus Campbell, of the New River Shipyards. I want to see you alone."

There were a half-dozen men in the room, and four women—lieutenants of agitation, and their followers, brainy sluts. The Bum swept them with an eye cold as a search-light.

"Go outside!" he commanded.

They looked at him dubiously, half rising.

"Outside, I said!" His tones had a cutting sneer, like the lash of a dog-whip. The men and women left without a word. He turned to Campbell and waited. The shipyard expert sat down silently and drew an ominous breath. He leaned across toward Trevelyan. His jaw was set. His eyes were like granite.

"There's trouble up in the Keogh shipyard." He put his facts clearly. "The men are demanding more than they are entitled to. And somebody is urging them on. I think that somebody is you."

"That is right." The Bum's voice was crisp and business-like.

"I came here to-night to tell you it's got to stop, and stop damned quick at that."

Trevelyan said nothing for an instant. He looked up and studied Campbell shrewdly.

"The working-man has his rights, Mr. Campbell—"

"You can keep that stuff for the platform, my man." Each word of Campbell's punched like a boxer's jab. "You and I are facing facts. Are you going to stop it?"

"Just a minute." Trevelyan leaned back and looked him squarely in the eye. "What is your interest in the matter?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I've got no intention of sitting by and seeing my employer ruined, her workmen put out on strike, the militia called out, an era of revolution begun in this town."

"That's my game," the Hunts Point Bum said.

"If that's your game," Campbell exploded, "by God! I'm going to stop it right now." He put his hand in his pocket.

"Listen to me, Campbell." Trevelyan became animated. Determination made itself graphic in his face. The notes of his voice began to throb like an engine. "That's my game. That's my life-work—to crash the whole damned fabric of society from bottom to top, because I believe it rotten. I've got my own reasons for doing it, and damned good reasons they are. I've got nothing against you or Miss Keogh. The only reason I pick the Keogh shipyards is a question of strategy. It's a weak point. I'm going ahead. As sure as hell I'm going ahead. Well, what do you say?"

"You'll go ahead no farther than right now." Campbell took his magazine pistol from his pocket. Trevelyan sat back.

"Yes," he admitted. "Of course, that's one way. You can shoot me sitting here, and you'll in all probability get away with it, because the papers are saying I'm a menace to society. God knows they might even give you a medal. But between ourselves, it would be a bit unsportsman-like, wouldn't it?"

Campbell was fingering the weapon undecisively. The Hunts Point Bum calmly lighted a cigarette.

"Mind you, I'm not afraid of being killed. I don't

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

mind, if comes to that. But I don't think you're the actor for the rôle of common hangman. Put it down. I've got a proposition to make to you."

Angus put the weapon in his pocket. He faced the agitator.

"I'm playing my game, as I told you," Trevelyan said. "You're playing yours. If you can get me fair, you're doing a big service, not only to yourself but to the whole fabric you represent. What do you say?"

"Oh, I'll get you, all right." Campbell rose.

"Good man!" The agitator applauded heartily. "I can't offer to shake hands with you or buy you a drink. It 'll be a good fight and no quarter. And thanks for not offering to bribe me. They nearly all do."

VII

Because she told herself that it would be wrong to engross herself entirely in business, and really because she liked it, she still went about to dances. There was no lack of welcome for her there, neither from the older people because she was rich, nor from the younger because she was so good-looking. The women were very cordial to her, for they thought she was out of competition, as it were, being too taken up with the venture of business to have time for the venture of marriage or the hypnosis of young men. To all of them she was very cordial—even to the sleek-haired young dancing men who were dubbed "tango lizards," after the phrase of some hysterical newspaper, even to the curly-headed ukulele-players just unloosed from college. She had many a suitor,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

for, protected though she was by the aura of business, the armor of economic knowledge, she had money, and that was a lodestone for many—for the Reverend Clyde Covington, who had been a year at Oxford and had written a book on liturgies, a cultured, requiem-faced, sententious little priest, whose manner he firmly believed was the manner of the English aristocracy. There was Tony Van Opper, a New York importation, a banker, pop-eyed, heavily patroon, lively as a dead fish and equally as brilliant. There was Leonard Holmes, the young banker, who had worked his way through college and was hunting for a rich marriage, as eager to sell his athletic frame and healthy peasant blood as any unfortunate to sell her virtue. To all of them and to more she was very pleasant, somewhat comradely, cunningly moving aside from a situation which would entail a proposal of marriage as a boxer avoids leading when he will receive a crushing counter. Slim and tall and rounded and very bonny, and glowing with the purity of a fixed star, she stood surrounded by this crowd of satellites, somehow like a cartoon in *Life*.

And where she went went Angus Campbell, not like the lamb in the nursery rhyme of Mary, but a strong, indefinite presence boding protection. He danced badly and talked very little, but he was continually to be seen sitting back and allowing somebody else to talk to him, a massaged merchant, for instance, whom he regarded with a look that meant, "It may be so, of course, but, you old son-of-a-gun! it sounds pretty thin to me." Or you had the feeling while some aged dame was exploring the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

depths of disreputable family history for his benefit, that while he was superficially polite and interested, he was cursing her very proficiently and very deeply beneath his breath. The slim dancing men and the curly-headed ukulele-players he watched with an open and very merry smile. "If I only had you on board a boat, buddies," you could see his eyes glint, "by God and His Mother! . . ."

They had gone to the monthly dance at the neighboring country club, and a very notable gathering it was. On the balcony behind the palms the hired orchestra now zoomed through a waltz or broke into the epileptic rhythm of a shimmy measure, with the negro utility man now clicking bones, now blowing a fog-horn, now breaking into an egregious Congolese howl. To the dance came George Choat's wife, the plump, electric blonde, whose misunderstood nature was the prey of every philanderer in the state. Thither came the Joe Mackeons, young, newly married, excessively quarrelsome. Thither came Elsie Farrington, garbed in reform clothes, thin, emancipated, dancing like a nautch-girl. Thither came Jack Stettinius's wife, the tall Amazon, about whom everybody said it was a shame, and that some day Jack would find out and there would be murder. . . . And thither came Mam Diston, with her eternal genealogical lecture centering about her relationship to Admiral Sampson, her long neck, her gorgeous pearls. And there was Suzanne Thompson there, and Miss Nita Fisher.

And among the men there was Charles Gill, with his horn spectacles, who never played golf for less than a hundred dollars a hole, and Val Thompson,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

who had married into the mint-julep set at Virginia Beach and been promptly kicked out of it through the Reno courts. And there was Jimmie Penniman, who had to be bought away from a designing burlesque star by his worshiping mother. And there was the curly-headed husband of Hallie Mayers, who had once been her mother's chauffeur.

And notable among them, and aloof, and sneering, and not quite steady on his feet, was Al Norton—Al Norton, whom the older men avoided because he had never drawn a sober breath since his father died! Al Norton, whose notorious love-affairs were the conversational axis of the Monday-afternoon bridge-parties. The débutantes regarded him with a sort of admiring horror, as they might have regarded the apparition of Apollyon. The young matrons watched him with a subdued longing. And through them all he passed, contemptuous, cynical, aloof—and not quite steady on his feet.

VIII

He came toward her through the press of dancers, his grim, cynical smile clearing a way for him as much as did his unsteady gait. A score of other women would have fled at his approach, but, for all his reputation, Derith Keogh liked him; she could never forget old days when she and he and John were children together, practising jack-knife and swan dives. And, besides, she was of her father's blood, who had been one of a battalion of roaring men. . . .

“Baby”—he sat down beside her—“I got something to tell you.”

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"What is it, Al?" She made way for him with a smile. Norton had taken a medal for Greek verse at college, but cultured speech was one of the many conventions he had jettisoned. "Derry, old girl, I'm going to put you wise."

This was no desultory announcement, she felt. Norton had something on his mind, and he wanted sincerely to help her.

"You're being played for the worst kind of a sucker," he told her. "I been hearing about what's going on at the works, and I know. All they want is your coin, and you're a fool if you let 'em get it."

"Al," she protested, "you talk just like Angus Campbell."

"Angus Campbell is a damned sensible guy," he nodded. "Now listen to me, Derry. I been through the mill. When father died and went to hell, where he belonged"—a blasphemous filial expression, but one granted true of Ebenezer Norton, that cold and selfish mortgage merchant and usurer with the sanctimonious whiskers and pious black apparel—"I was wised up damned quick. The bunch came around looking for my money. They tried to play me for a come-on, like your brother John was played. And John got it in the neck, all right! I know, girlie, I know."

She listened to him silently. She felt he was wrong, but there was no use protesting.

"Christ!" he exploded, suddenly. He slammed her knee as he would a man's. "Do you know that a bishop came around and asked me to put up a chapel somewhere in memory of Pop? In memory of that old nickel-nursing widow-robber!" He

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

fumbled for a match to light his cigarette; gave it up. "First and only chance I got of putting the boots to a bishop, and I went to it, baby! I went to it!"

"Every bunch of grafters in the world came down on me—interior decorators, and God knows what! I got sick of it. So I steps on the gas and I goes down to Mac the barkeep and I tells him. 'Forget it,' says he. And I goes to it and forgets it. And now I do what I damn well like, and have a good time into the bargain. The only crowd that haven't lost heart over me are the undertakers."

He surveyed the rollicking dance-party with a grin.

"Funny!" he nodded. "Just like the back room in Kenny's saloon. Only the dancing there's a bit more decent."

He turned to her again.

"Derry, old girl, I give you a straight tip. Forget this labor business. Put the screws on and get all you can out of the business. And go and get yourself a husband, a nice, easy-going guy you can boss hell out of. And when you get tired of him put the skids under him and get another. And go down to New York, kid, and throw your gears in high. Show 'em some speed. There's only two kinds of people in life—the crooks and the suckers. Don't be a sucker, Derry."

"You're wrong, Al," she said, simply.

"I'm right," he retorted, "and the day 'll come when you'll say to me, 'Al, old boy, you had the right idea.'"

"No! no!" she protested.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"The day 'll come." He rose. "You'll say it. I may be the guest of honor at a cold-meat party when you're put wise, right under the daisies. But you'll say it, 'Al, old boy, you had the right idea!'"

He left her abruptly and moved through the rush of dancing men and their partners toward where Angus Campbell stood by the door.

"I been trying to put that girl wise," he told Campbell. "How long do you think she'll stand for the stuff they're putting over on her?"

"Not an instant after she finds it out."

"Then what 'll happen?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I'll tell you," Norton prophesied. "Derry 'll simply cut loose. She'll go down to New York and she'll give that town a treat. Boy, she'll show them some speed!"

"No, she won't!"

"The hell she won't!" Norton laughed. He was silent for a while, looking about the room. The conversation of a reputable, bald-headed gentleman with a closely cropped mustache caught his ear. "For the love o' Mike!" he jeered. "Did you get that? Did you hear old Kenyon talk about that duty of an employer to his help? What about that dry-goods store of yours, Kenyon?" He called out, "Six bucks a week to girls and 'haven't you got a gentleman friend?'" He laughed uproariously and moved through the door. "I'm off to Nigger Pete's," he announced. "They may be a bunch of crooks down there, but they're not hypocrites!"

CHAPTER XI

BECAUSE the night was warm for spring, and because, too, there was something stirring in her, vague, indefinite, she had gone out into the terraced garden. Without, the trees had huddled into delicate, soft, bluish green, and the young flowers were beginning to show, like delicate, shy girls. A gentle south wind came through the garden with a soft susurrus, and overhead the young May moon was high above the heavens, like a gilded sickle.

She could not understand what had drawn her out into the garden, for within all was comfortable. In the ordered room she had left a wood fire burning, in unexpected potassium and cupric flames, and the shaded lamps glowed mellowly on the ornaments of the room—a minor picture of Zuloaga's, "Mercedes Vengochea in Green and Gold"; the honest bulk of the grand piano; the slim-legged table with its books cast here and there—Loti's *Aziyade*, and a play of D'Annunzio's; Mr. Kipling's *A Diversity of Creatures*, and a volume by a new eccentric poet—all books she had wanted to read; but she had put them aside and, leaning toward the fire, her hands about her knees, she had abandoned herself to thinking.

Only a year ago since her father had died, she

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

remembered, and things had changed. The road plotted out for her then, so broad seemingly, so clear, so assured, had become a muck of brambles. A welter of problems connected with the works; the subconscious eternal waiting for something to resolve itself in her brother's life—all these lives, once straight and running free, had become tangled, a hideous mass of knots, on which she looked with the puzzled incompetence of a child. The golden romance she had looked forward to had become exasperatingly marred, like the plot of some inept writer. It had not risen to the heights of unexpected drama. It was just marred.

She gave over thinking about it, for an indefinite something was stirring within her. She took up a book by her side and put it down again. She went over to the piano, turned the leaves of music, and moved away. With slow steps she went to the door and made her way to the garden. She intended to see the wolf-hounds before she turned in for the night, but them she forgot also.

Before her the garden lay, a part of her life so integral that she never noticed it—the garden her father had laid out with the meticulous domestic thoroughness that an old sailor will have. There was the broad strip of splendid lawn where the tennis-court was, beneath the ivied wall where the birds' nests were; tier on tier in front of her were the flower-beds, only soft, downy green as yet. Along the western wall were the yellow, old-fashioned beehives that would soon be humming with their myriad population. Here and there were gnarled apple-trees, remnants of a bygone orchard, which

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

her father had spared in his plans. Down there in the niche between the high stone walls was the figurehead of a ship—of the old *Artemis*, a great gilded form of an Amazonian woman with a tongue of gilded flame on her forehead. Old Shane Keogh had set it there, as a community of monks would place there a statue of Christ's Mother, or of Saint Ignatius Loyola with his beads in his hand. And right in the center of the garden, with the moon-beams playing about its squat pillar, a sun-dial, a thing of florid Gothic script, with its plaintive device, *Eheu, fugaces anni!*

All her life this garden of her father's had been to her a retiring-place for dreams, a perfumed and solitary chamber, very like her heart, where she lived a queer life she would have been ashamed to tell anybody. Sitting under the gnarled trees, her fancy would populate the roods of earth and the flowers and trees. In the young summer she would see the hosting of Irish fairies there under a great silver moon, *cluricauns* and *leprecauns*, very little folk in green caps and red caps, dancing to the music of diminutive pipers, their tiny feet twinkling like mice. And in the autumn, at the end of October, she could imagine the *Puka* visiting the garden on his way through the world to the mountains of the Fenian women, a dark, terrifying monster, half horse, half goat, his nostrils snorting fire. In winter, when the snow was on the ground and the flower-beds covered, the trees hideously bare, its exquisite loveliness would be expressed in the figure of a tall woman in a black cloak, playing on a harp a cold and lonely melody like that strain of Chopin's they

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

play for the "*Ballet des Sylphides*." In the torridness of summer heat, when even the breeze from off the water was warm and brought with it a sense of saltiness mingled with a heaviness of flowers, she would think of a garden of the East, by the waterfront of Trebizond, where some mature, black-haired, full-thighed woman danced, now languorously, now passionately, with every fiber of her body to the strains of clanging, barbarous music. . . .

But to-night, with the young spring moon out, and the young spring flowers and the downy grass, she felt an immense sense of languor, a strange melancholia that was not a sadness at all, but a tingling of nerves from feet to head. She passed down the garden and stopped by the sun-dial, and the Gothic lettering stood out, quaint, archaic, under the shimmer of the moon. *Eheu, fugaces anni!* Alas, the flying years! But that meant nothing to her. She was listening to the voice of the garden and the voice of the wind. And it seemed to her that they were calling to her—the furry buds upon the trees, the gentle ground beneath her feet, the soft wind that was enveloping her. They all had some queer message that she could not understand. *Eheu, fugaces anni!*

She moved away from the dial and over the green-sward, with that throbbing languor still in every vein, in every nerve of her, and as she moved a faint cry came from her lips that was like a moan, but was not a moan, but an articulation of electric blood. She felt a strange desire to dance through the moon-beams and under the branches of the gnarled trees, naked as a dagger, a slim whirling figure with blos-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

somy breasts and slender white limbs, as impersonal in its way as moonlight, and as soft as the soothings of the wind—a sort of hesitating, impulsive dance, a Masque of Virginity. And at the climax of that there would appear a figure from an old mythology, Angus, son of the Dagda, from Bru of the Boyne, whom the elder Celts knew, a tall and shining figure. . . . And then would be forgotten the world that is troubled and anxious in its sleep, and the life she would drink from his lips would be a fine elixir, not the sordid, degenerate potion of present unhappy days . . .

She waited an instant, calling, calling aloud in her heart, somehow expectant. But nothing happened, and little by little the queer languor changed to a load of disappointment, weighing heavily within her. The moon no longer called to her in radiant speech, and the message of the garden was obscured, like a dubious oracle. And hushed were the voices of the buds, and the whisper of the wind not intelligible.

Eheu, fugaces anni!

CHAPTER XII

I

HE sat in the grill-room of the Quatz' Arts in New York, drinking moodily. Jean, his wife, had gone to a charity ball with some women friends—motion-picture actresses and women of the stage whose position in society was more than dubious. And because John Keogh was not intrigued by dancing, and because in that hysterical gathering his moodiness would have seemed like an Egyptian mummy at a Pharaoh's feast, Jean had not pressed him to go. She had been, he began to suspect, relieved at his decision to remain away. She had new men friends there already, with whom she would be more at ease—an aviator who but a year before had been a chauffeur tipping his hat to his employers and sitting beside a Belgian griffin on the front seat of a limousine. Now the man had glossed over his mechanic's manners with a veneer learned from the demi-monde, and wore exaggerated evening clothes such as are urged by writers in theater programs. And there were others whom Jean had collected about her, a motion-picture actor, an Englishman of the meaner sort, who had until a few years before been a clerk in a dry-goods establishment; the editor of a cheap magazine, dealing in sordid situations

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

which he called gripping realism. Of such were the kingdom of Jean.

For a year now he had been ashamed, for it seemed to him somehow that he had fallen in the vague sense in which a woman falls. Something inside him, which until his marriage had been inviolate, had been soiled, had become shriveled. Something had died. A little more than a year ago all life had seemed fair to him and very clean. He could remember his room in his father's house in New River, a broad, nearly bare room, such as an athlete's should be, with a fresh wind blowing through it night and day. And when he rose in the morning he would drive off for a game of golf with Willie Campbell, the lean professional from Carnoustie, and there was something so—so—so like fresh, clean water about the air and the fairway and the scent of the closely cut grass. There was joy in everything, in the long raking tee shot that rose gradually through the air, in the parabola of the pitch, in the cunning, curving putt on the sloping greens. In the evening there was Derith, his sister, very tender, very good to see, and there was his father, great, gaunt, with the look of eagles in his splendid face. He could remember the old man's brisk conversation.

"Some of these days, my lad, I'm going to put you to work for your living."

"I'm ready, sir, any moment. I'll do it to-day."

"You'll do it when it damned well suits me and not before."

"Don't you see, buddy John," Derith would explain to him, with a little moisture in her eyes, "that he is proud of you? It's the joy of his life to see

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

you winning athletic championships for your country. Don't you see? He's satisfied," and then she would laugh her tinkling, musical note. "But he wouldn't acknowledge that. Oh no! Not he!"

All about him in the grill-room the tables were being filled. The after-theater crowd was pouring in to eat and dance and be prodigal of its nervous gaiety, to drink and whisper hotly that the night might go and another day come. At a near-by table a bediamonded dowager ordered expensive food for a professional man dancer, a product of Brownsville's gutters, dark, Oriental, appallingly vicious. Near at hand two cloak-and-suit manufacturers were taking the wraps from a brace of models who might have stepped from the pages of a dusky, perfumed Arabian night. Across the way a red-haired girl was talking to a corpulent man with a hooked nose who eyed her appraisingly. Her face was peer only to the ruinous face of Helen, wife of Menelaus the king. And she was very drunk . . .

"Yes, his father! He might have gone to him now. To Derith he could hardly tell one-tenth of his troubles, because that red, tender heart of hers would weep blood at his plight, and, moreover, he was very ashamed. They two, who had been so much to each other, in their quiet, undemonstrative way, were now parted as by a high iron wall. Angus Campbell! He thought of Angus for an instant, but he put the oppressive, hard-headed Scot from his mind. Angus couldn't help him. Nor perhaps would he if he could. He had no patience with a man making a fool of himself. Until tragedy occurred, or want, Angus could not be called on. And

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

yet, in the old dead days, Angus had been closer to him than a brother. All his life he had known Angus. And now between them had arisen a jagged, spiked thing like a *chevaux-de-frise*.

The drummer on the little raised orchestra was playing very gently, by way of practice, a tum-tum-tum, very metallic. The violinist was drawing his bow across the whining strings. The pianist fingered the keys slowly. In an instant now the room would be shimmying like a sailors' dive. John Keogh noticed nothing. He swore gently. A waiter hurried up. Keogh pointed to the empty glass.

"*Encore un cognac et siphon,*" the waiter chanted.

Somehow, for the first time in his life, he began to understand what that fierce and gaunt old man meant to him. Beneath the eagle eye, the hawk's beak, the steel and whalebone frame, there was a thing very sib to the boy. He felt somehow that his father would have stood by him now, in sickness of soul, as he would have stood by him when he was a boy, had any physical illness overcome him. Yes, if his father were alive, he would arise like the son in the story which Luke reports, and come to his father, and his father would greet him as one who was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found. . . . But his father was dead. And also, by God! he had been no prodigal, had wasted no substance in riot. What had he done, he asked himself, bitterly, but give honorably, fully, from love and chivalry, his heart and soul to one unprotected girl? Things delicate as fragile glass, rarer than rubies, irreplaceable, he had given those to her. And she had taken no notice of them. A necklace

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of pearls, a sedan automobile, either would have aroused interest in her and a certain amount of gratitude, but a heart and soul, and high chivalry and great tenderness. . . . And yet he loved that girl.

"What is wrong?" he asked himself. "What, in God's name, is wrong?" And aloud: "Everything! But what's to be done?" A waiter hurried at the sound of his voice. Keogh pointed to the glass.

"Encore un cognac et siphon."

When he had left the apartment that evening, the apartment they had rented from a Garden dancer—a very garish thing, but Jean would have it—he had looked about him with an air of disgust. On dressing-tables were littered perfumes, essences, unhealthy, not clean. The mirrors, the drapings, the heaviness of incense, were not a setting for Jean, but for woman, generic woman. And the thing disgusted him vaguely. How far all this had been from the healthy mellowness of his dreams! He had wanted Jean as a wife and sweetheart, who would manage his house while he did a man's work in the world, while he stood by Derith and Angus Campbell, helping them, not understanding exactly what their vision was, but feeling it vaguely, and satisfied that what they were doing was the right thing. And here he was—faugh!—spending the fleeting years, unhappy, dissatisfied, a reproach to men. . . . And yet he loved that girl. And what was he to do?

Across the din and laughter of the room a slow, cadenced, raucous voice came compellingly. John gave a start. He knew it:

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

*"Or il est mort, passé trente ans,
Et je remains vieille, chenue.
Quant je pense, lasse! au bon temps,
Quelle fus, quelle devenue;
Quant me regarde toute nue,
Et je me voy si tres changeée
Povre, seiche, mesgre, menue,
Je suis presque toute enragée."*

"Gad!" John said. "Al Norton!"

He turned around and saw him at a table across the room, hard-bitten, cynical, and just now in one of the moods which were becoming rarer all the time, when he would sit back raptly and revert for the moment to the scholar and poet who had taken the medals for Greek verse, and the student of Villon. By his side was a tall, dark woman with a face sculpted clean and fine, like a dark Joan of Arc. Young Keogh recognized her for a famous contralto. And opposite him was a small, blond, dollish little girl—Kenton Swope's former wife, who had run away with a life-guard. And lolling alongside, very sober, very like a drawn knife, cold, dangerous, was Monte Palliser, the gambling-man. They seemed bored, but Norton kept on the sonorous French of the "Armorer's Daughter." He grinned as he watched the opera-singer. He was prophesying her end:

*"Qu'est devenu ce front poly,
Ces cheveux blons, sourcilz voulitz
Grant entroeil, le regard joly . . .*

*Ces larges rains, ce sadinet
Assis sur grosses fermes cuisses,
Dedens son petit jardinet?"*

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

He stopped with a laugh. His grim, insulting eyes swept his guests from head to foot.

"What you would like to have," he said, "is 'The Face on the Barroom Floor.' You're an intelligent bunch, I'll tell the world." He had a long, satisfying drink. "You know, damn it! I can't explain it, but I sort of like you.

'It was a balmy summer's evening,
And a goodly crowd was there
That well-nigh filled Joe's barroom—'

His gaze wandered about the grill, and dropped suddenly on John. He rose to his feet.

"Bums," he addressed his guests, "I'm going to leave you for a while. I'm going over to talk to a regular guy."

As he walked across the floor, a trifle unsteady on his feet, as always, it flashed across young Keogh's mind that here was a man who would advise him. He couldn't tell Derith, and Angus could not help him, but Norton, who knew more of women than is good for a man to know, might, in his crass, cynical way, hit on a solution. They had been friends since childhood, and indeed Derith and himself were the only ones of his old set for whom Norton had any inclination. He seemed even to have an affection for the brother and sister.

"How's the boy?" Norton rasped out, in that tough voice and diction he had made his own. "How's the old kid? Fighting Old Man Booze! Brandy and soda. I'll say you're a sport. Where's your jane?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"At some motion-picture charity ball, Al."

"Well, come over and meet this gang of silk-stockings rough-necks. They're ninety-nine per cent. bums, but the rest is partly human. You get me? Partly. I said partly. That Jane's got the best set of pipes in this country, but 'ain't got the brains of a Brussels sprout. I said a Brussels sprout. I'll claim the blonde's a looker, though, but she 'ain't got the decency of a Belgian hare—"

"Al, I don't feel up to meeting anybody."

"What's the troub', sis? Tell your uncle Al." He looked at the boy for a moment. Sat down. Became serious. "Shoot. Is it about friend wife?"

John nodded. Norton thought for a moment. He beckoned to a waiter for a drink.

"Come on, Swede. Li'l action! Li'l action." He turned to Keogh. "You want me to give you the real office. Hey?"

"I do."

"You and I's friends, John. You and I and Derry. Campbell's a good scout, but he's not human. I'll say he's not human. Well, then, you'd better git rid of that dame pretty damned quick."

John shook his head. Norton misinterpreted the gesture.

"Sure you can." He pointed to the boy's feet. "Throw those dogs in high, and while you're away get a lawyer to handle the thing, and in six months it 'll be all over. You can go back and help Derry build her damned ferryboats. You get me? Travel, Polack, travel!"

"No, I don't want that, Al."

"Well, what in hell do you want?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Al, I want her to come north with me; to keep the house; to have kids; to be happy wholesomely; to care for me rightly; to understand my caring for her. It's not so much to ask of a woman, when you've married her to make her happy and protect her. I want to get her away from this unhealthy air and unhealthy gang she travels with." He all but dropped his head on his hands. "But I can't make her see it."

Norton looked at the despondent figure for a moment. A little smile crept about the cynical lips, a smile one would hardly have credited Norton with possessing, a tender, understanding smile. How young the kid was! How clean! And then grimness set in about the features. Hell! he swore to himself, what a rotten deal!

"Now, listen, Jack," he said, slowly. "There's two kinds of janes in the world. There's some like your sister. Hell! She's a lady. And there's your wife, who isn't— Now wait a minute! wait a minute! You asked me, didn't you? Well, I'm telling you. There's only one way to handle that dame. You want her to go north. You just look her straight in the eye—see! And you say to her: 'Listen, squaw! You be ready to hop a boat for home in one hour. That'll be all.' And if she isn't, you draw back with the right, and, bam! drop her for the full count. Now wait a minute! I'm telling you. It's the only thing a jane like that understands. She'll love you for it. Show her who's boss. And when kids come later she'll ease down."

But John Keogh was looking at his friend with reproachful and somewhat pitying eyes. Poor Al!

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

he thought, he was going down, going under. He forgot the sonorous Villon strain he had heard but a minute before, and saw only in front of him a friend coarsened and debased by drink and loose living. Poor Al! It never occurred to him for an instant that Al Norton might be right. He shook his head and smiled a little pathetically. Norton shrugged his shoulders.

"I want a li'l' service here." Norton fixed the head waiter with his glittering eye. "And I want it pretty damned quick. Bring me booze."

"Yes, Mr. Norton. Yes, sir." The staff rushed hysterically at the call of their favorite patron. John Keogh's face had grown more despondent still.

"I wonder why she married me?" he asked himself. He raised his face agonizedly to his friend. "Why did she marry me, Al? Why did she do it?"

Norton looked up, surprised; was on the point of laughing riotously; closed his eyes narrowly; put his hand on Keogh's.

"Listen, Johnny," he asked, quietly, for an instant reverting back to the Norton of ancient days. "You care for that girl?"

Keogh nodded.

"I guess she must have cared for you, too," he lied, very like a gentleman.

II

She was sick of her husband, Jean confessed to herself openly, as she came up in the elevator. Bonds, Vernon Bonds, the motion-picture man, had seen her home in her own car, and she had sent him back to

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

his bachelor apartments in it. He had bent over her hand, kissing it, his sleek black hair glistening with cosmetic. He raised his languorous gray eyes to her as he unbent the supple back.

"Good night, dear lady," he bade her, in what he conceived was the Oxford accent—an abominable imitation of an abominable thing. "And may I be remembered in your pleasant dreams."

Why couldn't John be like that? she asked herself, not a little bitterly, as she ascended with the sleepy Barbadian at the wheel. Why couldn't he be chivalrous and courteous, as the English movie actor was? All night, at the ball, Bonds had been by her side, with his caressing voice and his wonderfully inflected "dear lady." How different to John! pah! John, with his eternal seriousness, his continual fussing about life and work, and his eternal surveillance of her, as though she were a child. If he had only some polish, some color such as Bonds had! Or if he were only like Britton, the aviator, who had been with her when Bonds was not there. There was a sport!

"Good night, Mis' Keogh." The boy let her out of the car.

"Oh, good night, my man," she responded, haughtily. So Bonds would have acted, in his aristocratic way.

Britton—she blushed a little as she thought of Britton. He had looked at her much as a footman might look at a housemaid. And she had somehow liked it. There was no longer any need for restraint and discipline, now that she was married, had hooked her goldfish. The strain whence she had sprung was

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

coming to the fore in her—the factory stock which knew not delicacy and from whom the sweating hours of millwork had stolen modesty. Beneath the veneer of her clothes, her cosmetics, her jewelry, Britton had seen a soul of his own kind. It meant nothing to him that she was wived to John Keogh, of the Keogh shipyards, the discus champion, the crack golfer. Blazes! Wasn't he Britton, the aviator, as good as any man—and a damned sight better, if it came to that! He ogled her daringly as he danced. She dropped her eyes coyly. The orchids in her bosom were drooping.

"My flowers are sleeping," she said.

"If I were where they are," Britton whispered, "you can bet I wouldn't go asleep." And he eyed the white curve which to John Keogh was sanctuary, where one day his babies would nestle with satisfied eyes and tiny, eager mouths. And John Keogh's wife giggled like a slut!

She slipped into the apartment and found him sitting there—quiet, a little morose, a book of James Braid's on his knee, and a short brier between his teeth. She shivered a little when she saw him. He was so big, so—so somehow coarse, she felt, in that apartment furnished so *cocotte*. He rose as he saw her.

"Aren't you gone to bed yet?" she said.

"Didn't feel like it." There was strain to his voice. "You got home all right?"

"Yes. Olive Stockton saw me home," she lied, glibly. There was no reason for her to lie, for jealousy had never entered his mind. It was just Jean.

"Have a good time?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Poor!" She shrugged her shoulders. "The season is so tiring." That was how Bonds would have put it, she was sure.

"Jean"—he saw his opening—"I want to say something to you. If everything is so boring, why don't we go home—"

"At three in the morning," she said, impatiently, "it is a bit hard to talk about serious matters." She yawned. "Why not to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," John had risen. For the first time since she had known him she saw him angry. "To-morrow you will rise at twelve. You will have a cocktail. At one you will have lunch with Olive Stockton. At three you are going to a masseuse on Fortieth Street. Later Anne Corrigan is going to bring you to a 'duck of a dressmaker.'" Bitterness crept into his voice like acid. "Later you are going to dinner, are you not, with some friends down to Greenwich Village? You are all intellectually starved and you want to talk art and literature with Jewish hat models and automobile salesmen. And you will be home God knows when. The day after, blast it! There's something else, ending up at the Follies, or Daly's at Yonkers, where you can shimmy and drink until morning. Me! I'm sick of the whole damned business!"

If he had followed up his advantage there and done as Al Norton had advised him, very probably indeed she would have been at his feet, but the chivalric strain of the gentlefolk who begot him made him already regret his outburst.

"Why did you marry me at all?" There was agony in his voice.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

She looked at him as Al Norton had looked at him, shrewdly and with a desire to laugh. No, she told herself, he had not the faintest idea why she had married him. But he was dangerous now. "Be careful, sister," she said to herself. Very cleverly her green eyes assumed a reproachful, nearly haggard look. She remembered a trick of the Talmadge girl's in a screen drama, and the left corner of her mouth quivered, and her hands dropped limply by her side.

"You know well why I married you," she accused him. "And this is how you treat me."

He said nothing. She had countered him too cleverly.

"Hon, I know what you want and I want it, too. You want a place in the country. Listen, sweetie, there's a place up in Harrison Olive Stockton was talking about; we ought to take it." Olive had been working hard on that deal in prospect of a fat commission. "And we'll get an interior decorator to do it up for us. Olive knows of a peach—Friedrich Feind." Feind was another source of Olive's income. "I want a place to invite my friends to for a week-end."

"Why can't we go home?"

"Hon, I can't go home to where everybody will point me out as the seamstress's daughter. I couldn't bring up my friends there—all famous in their line, like Anne Corrigan"—she was famous in her way, and John winced—"or like Vernon Bonds, or Jack Britton—"

"Who are they?"

"Vernon Bonds, the motion-picture star, and

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Britton, the famous aviator. Just friends I met. Surely you are not jealous, honey," she smiled. "They're nothing to me. There's only you!"

"But about me, Jean," he complained. "I want to work. I'm sick of doing nothing—"

"Yes, hon. I've been thinking about that. I think about you all the time. You never credit me with anything. You can work as well here as you can in New River, and do a million times better. Now listen, you can easily get into a broker's office in New York and make a mint of money. All the smart people do it. And you make friends. That game of golf of yours ought to be worth a hundred thousand a year to us." John went white to the lips; but she didn't understand, he told himself. "I've figured it all out—"

"But, Jean, I don't want to make money. We've got enough. Derry is right. I'm beginning to see what she means. We've got to do something in life—"

She flushed angrily. He had made a false move. She was quick as a cat to take advantage of it.

"You bring up your sister now! Amn't I nearer to you than your sister is? Did your sister give up her life to stay by you as I did? And don't you know your sister hates me and is trying to get us apart? Because she's an old maid, even at her age, and can't get a husband, she hates me, who could get a thousand. Your sister! Always bringing up your sister. It's a pity you couldn't have married her." She worked herself up to the point of tears. "You always bring her up because you know it hurts me, and you never do anything you know would please me. God! I wish I were dead!"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

She tore open the door of her bedroom, closing it behind her; she snapped the lock. The tears vanished from her eyes and a little light of triumph glistened in them. She had won. She had won again, as she would always win.

"You poor boob!" she sneered.

She undressed herself slowly, uncovering that beauty of hers that was like an exotic, tropical, very venomous insect's, and she drowsed off to sleep very happily, with a magazine of cheap sex fiction in her hands, to which, indeed, she paid little attention, for she was thinking of Vernon Bonds, with his sleek manners and his woman's eyes. "Dear lady!" Why didn't American men get some polish? Also, there were Britton's hard eyes, challenging, daring. What was that he had said about the flowers sleeping? She flushed pleasurabley. And again she giggled. The damned slut!

III

In his cheap hotel between Sixth Avenue and Broadway Bonds mused before going to bed. He sleeked his hair and oiled it—a trick of his counter-jumping days of which he could never rid himself. He regarded his too regular features in the glass.

"A rather common little beast," he said, half aloud. "But this Keogh person has the money. Now if she could be advised to make him settle a chunk of property on her— Hum!" He brushed his eyelashes up. "The chap must be worth all of a couple of millions. Say a million on her." He proceeded to cold-cream his face. "She'd divorce him like a shot. I wouldn't mind a little flutter in matri-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

mony—while the coin lasted.” He smiled in the glass, showing the beautiful and expensive teeth which a Brooklyn matron had had set in for him at a small fortune. “Amusing little beggar. Could never bring her to England, though. Very bad form. But if you can lay your fingers on this Keogh rotter’s money, old dear,” he addressed himself affectionately, “you can get rid of her jolly quickly. Then hurrah for England, home, and beauty!”

He chuckled to himself. Queer the way these women went on! What were their husbands doing, their fathers? Just grubbing for the dollar! And the wives and daughters were throwing the cash away lavishly on other people. There was Frank Barry, who got the motor-car and the jewelry from the widow of Olsen the lumberman. The doctors had said Olsen died of overwork—to make the money his widow was lavishing on a dancer. There were hundreds of others—Montgomery Burdett, the legitimate actor. It was a long time since he had acted—not since he had met that woman from Vermont. What was her name? By Jove! it quite escaped him. The railroad magnate’s wife. Queer. Couldn’t remember.

“Put your hand out, naughty boy!” he warbled, joyously.

Oh dear, yes! He must get in on that game. Of course, at home in England it wasn’t done. Well, hardly! Across here it was different. One came over to make money. . . .

“The women force it on you! Oh, absolutely! Absolutely!”

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

He plunged into bed and drew the coverlets up to his neck.

"Very hot stuff, that little red-head." He reached to turn out the light. "Wonder what kind of a bloody ass this Keogh fellow is?"

IV

Britton turned in to his apartment in One Hundred and Tenth Street. Fussing around the dining-room was a dark-haired girl in a pink kimono. She turned to greet him with a quick smile, and underneath her pallid, Oriental face, washed clean of its make-up when she left the cabaret, there glowed real passion and devotion for the stocky aviator.

"I got crab meat and pickles and turkey sandwiches and a couple of bottles of real beer; none of your two point seventy-five stuff, hon."

"And I got a sucker."

"At the ball?"

"I met a dame down there, wife of a rich guy that's crawling with coin. All she needs is a little loving and she'll make him come across good—"

"You'll do no loving to anybody except me," the kimono shot at him, viciously. "Just let me see any woman—"

"Cut that!" Britton's voice rasped like a file. "Cut it or I'll knock your block off. Do you think I want to be going to those balls with a set of cheap skates and Lizzies, if it wasn't for business? Don't you know damned well I'd rather be in the back room at Ike's playing pinochle with the bunch, in my shirt-sleeves, than going around dolled up like a

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

chorus-man? But it's down there you meet these suckers' wives. It's the wives you got to get. Those dames fall for you, if you're an aviator or a fighter or anything like that. You got to baby 'em along. Now, one more crack out of you, like you just said, and I'm go'n' to bust your bugle. See!"

"I know you love me, hon."

"Well, know it all the time, then. If I can get this woman's husband to put up the money for an air-line from here to Chicago, I can set four buses going. She can fix him, I think—"

"But he'll get the profits of your work—" the chorus-girl exclaimed, jealously.

"Oh, he will, will he? Listen, kid, when our lawyers get through with him— When Morris Cohen and Mac have been at that guy for a week he'll be sick of the day he ever even saw a picture of an airplane. And then you and I will be living the life of Reilly, hey!" He patted her hand with a clumsy tenderness. "All I want is that guy's dough. He can have his wife—if that's any good to him." He snorted indignantly. "Why doesn't that Dutchman put some butter on his sandwiches, hey? Some of these days," he reflected, moodily, "I'll go in and massage that kike's bean with a spanner. . . ."

CHAPTER XIII

“WIZARDS that chirp and mutter!”

Trevelyan stood on a Fifth Avenue corner. The turquoise April morning was all about him like a great blue cloak. The stately Avenue had all its Sunday freshness and clean quality, and the politely merry city people were strolling up and down, church or homeward bound, in the satisfying glory of morning clothes and spring frocks. An occasional limousine sped by noiselessly, and at intervals the buses lumbered along like monstrous green prehistoric insects.

“Wizards,” he quoted, savagely, from Isaiah, “wizards that chirp and mutter.”

He had, from strange attraction, gone to a church of his former communion that morning. And had listened to the sonorous Latin service, now proudly chanted in full plainsong, now secretly hushed like a Satanist ritual:

“*Introibo ad altare Dei,*” “I shall go to the altar of God.”

“*Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meum,*” “To God who rejoices my youth.”

Kneeling conventionally in his pew, his dark, volcanic, hawklike face gazing, critical and grim, at the celebrant and acolytes, at the reverent congregation,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

at the prim and pussy-footed ushers, his mind reverted back over the years to the period when he, a young and fervent monk, had been immersed in all that mystery. And very much as an abused and world-worn matron might look back on the cool white days of her virginity, he could see himself serving the Mass, a puny novice, with the sense of eternity and magnificence about him like the cool, unsoiled wind that sweeps the fixed and wandering stars. In those days he had felt God—had seen His presence in everything, in the song of the bird on the bough, in the blossoming trees, in the scuttling of a rabbit over the monastery lawn. Outside was fierce passion and hatred and doubt. But his function and the function of those like him was to keep in his heart, unspotted from the world, the peace of Eden's first morning, and to give it, like a cooling draught, to the parched throats of the weary and feverish doubters of the world.

“Domine, dilexi decorum domus tuæ,” “Lord, I have loved the beauty of thy house.”

He all but laughed aloud in savagery. In those days he had seen God as an ineffable melody, as the worker at some purring and gigantic loom. But the abbot had disillusioned him when he had told him, with worldly urbanity, to be sure, that there was no place for a priest's bastard in the decorum of the Lord's House.

He glanced around the filled aisles, and he thought for an instant of what God meant to these people. To some he was a hawk-eyed police-court judge who would bastile them in hell when, at their death, before the bar of justice, a superior angelic attendant

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

would open their *dossier*. But he was not above a little graft—as who is?—when given in the right spirit to His servitors on earth. Nor was He above a little flattery—as who is? So they were continually reminding Him that He was omnipotent, omniscient, ubiquitous. If the worst came to the worst, they would grovel like dogs.

“*Kyrie eleison*,” went on the ecclesiastical Greek. “*Christe eleison*,” “Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us.”

But to most of them, Trevelyan smiled grimly, to the righteous among them, God was very wise and very righteous and nohow vulgar. He was in an infinite degree something such as they themselves expected and hoped to be in their later years, a comfortable, upstanding as to morals, solid as to character, sort of Being, a glorification of the late Mr. Gladstone or of Governor Tilden. Dressing unostentatiously for dinner, in an atmosphere of bulky Victorian furniture, of safe books and prophylactic pictures, He would be an appreciator of moral worth. He would abominate reckless gambling on the stock exchange, but be indulgent toward a little flutter. He would abhor violent, electric passion, but approve well-regulated matrimony. He would be despondent over the working-man who drank beer in low saloons and conversed muscularly, with blasphemous and perspiring adjectives. He would have been very much at home with Queen Victoria. . . .

A wave of disgust swept over the labor leader. How different from what he had dreamed in those springlike monastery days, when he thought of the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Supreme Being as the mystic song of songs, as the white, ineffable rose, as the wind over the waves. And how clean and sweet his heart had been then—like a well of crystal water, and now it was a welter of angry surf . . .

"*Quomodo cecidisti de cælo, Lucifer, qui mane oriebaris,*" he told himself. "How thou art fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning!"

Well, if this was their God, this very comfortable Deity—he would be their Lucifer, grim, implacable, disturbing as an electric storm. They called him the Messiah of Sabotage. In a thousand wealthy homes he was feared, hated as a pestilence. And yet to-day he sat in this cathedral, in his bright tweeds and soft linen shirt, his gay foulard tie and soft deerstalker, well-cut russet brogues on his feet, and a solid walking-stock and gloves. He might have passed for a gentleman farmer or a sportsman. There was not a man there but would have been impressed by his haughty, fierce face, nor a woman by his broad shoulders and tapering, muscular figure. And yet they saw him, in their mind's eye, as a gigantic, hairy figure, with matted locks and mad eyes, and the yellow fangs of an ape, a skin thrown about him in the manner of the troglodytes, and a spiked club in his itching right claw. . . .

The preacher had gone into the lectern and was giving the text of his discourse:

"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.' From the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians; the sixth chapter and the fifth verse."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Glibly, speciously, smugly, the sermon flowed along. "The duty of servants and apprentices to their master, in fine," went on the young cleric, "is to be obedient, respectful, and faithful to them; to be diligent in their work and services, and not to suffer their masters to be injured in their property by any person."

Audibly Trevelyan gave a low laugh, and those near by glanced at him fiercely. What if he, the labor agitator thought, were to arise in that pulpit and speak as he could speak and had spoken. Those naked, cutting sentences of his, sharp as poniards, hypnotic, sensuous with trope and figure of speech, here and there bursting into jagged lightning. Now his voice would purr lowly in ridicule, until he had stripped their mean, lean hearts bare, and then he would stab and threaten until they were white and horror-stricken, and they would look at him in ghastly surmise, and seeing his eyes, terror would fall about them like a shroud, and some would die. . . .

Yes, it was all rotten, root and trunk, branch, fruit, and blossom. He had nothing better to give them. But he cared nothing for that. All he wanted was war and ruin. What if they knew that among them was the man who but a week ago had ordered the street-cars of Waterbury dynamited when the scabs were on their way to the mills. What if they knew that it was his plan that had sent bombs wide-spread among the financiers of America, until the steel and iron kings, and lumber barons, and munition magnates could no longer dare to open a private letter. Apart even from his own personal

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

hatred of society, was there one among them who merited otherwise? There was not one who was righteous. No. Not one.

Ah, but yes! There was. There was one he thought of night and day. There was Derith Keogh, of New River. There was an employer, he granted, who saw things clearly and acted fairly. More than fairly, too; very humanly. If they were all like her there would be little chance for his work in this world. And yet, somehow, it was against her works that his principal campaign lay.

Why was it? he asked himself. He admired her. She was in spirit and heart good, unspotted from the world. He liked her, too. He had seen her here and there, and he liked the bonniness of her, the splendid, lissome body, the clear white fire that shone within her. There was a woman, he told himself, a woman to marry and be the mate of a man. Warm, pulsating, human; fitted for burdens; undaunted in the face of trouble. She was the one person he would plunge into a river to save or drop his cynicism to protect in case of physical violence. She was woman as she had been first made to be. Within her glowed the clean white thing he had known when he was a student of the Word. And there was in her, too, the fine, glorious humanity which, he knew now, was very necessary unto life. She had them both, delicately adjusted as an alchemist's elixir. Even the God of Madison Avenue must look with reverence on such as she.

And yet Trevelyan wanted to smash her, bring her ideals about her ears, trample them, over them ride. And why? He couldn't understand. Ah

THE 'STRANGERS' BANQUET

yes, he could. His last thought had given him the secret:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job . . .?

CHAPTER XIV

I

"I WONDER," she thought—"I wonder if I am getting old."

She looked at herself in the great oval glass in that girl's bedroom of hers, so fresh, so virginal, for somehow Derith felt that in the last year she must have changed. There had been so much strain to her life—her father's death, her brother's marriage, the strain of the works. Not that the business end devolved to any extent on her—for of that Angus Campbell relieved her to every detail. Only on lines of policy was there any need of consulting her, except by way of routine. Her part was to carry out her father's ideals about labor and the friendly paternalism he had visioned capital to be. But that had been a muddle, she felt. And in thinking about it, and through puzzling over it, she felt she had become somehow old.

"No," she smiled. "Not yet." Facing her in the mirror was the same oval face with clean-cut features, like a woman of Ghirlandajo's; the gray, mystical eyes, now calm, now smiling with surcharged life; the wealth of black, silken hair.

"Am I getting hard," she asked again, "about the mouth, about the eyes?" And, honestly, she had

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

to tell herself no. There was no sign there, as yet. But in her heart a sort of fear was growing that in time she would become like some of the women she had met in New York who were out for careers in business. Some had grown very hard about the mouth, and suspicious in the eyes, as they looked at men. All illusions seemed to have dropped from these, all dreams, all romance. And their barren independence was all they had left—an arid raft in a cold and angry sea. And there were others who had become brazen, aping the manners of men, and had dropped the gentle sweetness that was their woman's portion. Unsexed was the all but indelicate word that described these. She laughed—that low, bubbling laughter of hers—remembering how her father had once described one of the tribe, Agnes Cram, who had risen to the vice-presidency of a bank in Providence.

"She has ceased to be a lady," old Shane diagnosed her, bitterly, "and has not yet succeeded in becoming a gentleman!"

Others, too, had changed. Women who once were pretty, bonny, even beautiful. Eyes that had once thrilled young men and made old men dream were hidden behind thick lenses, and peered at an interviewer with that contraction of the forehead that writes lines and wrinkles. Majestic hair which had once been hip-low, thick, silky, grew short now, scant, brittle. And bosoms that were once like delicate ivory cups—

"Ugh!" she shuddered, passionately, with that disgust that the thought of death's corruption gives. "I won't. I can't be like that!" It was worry and

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

strain that caused that. She wouldn't worry. Ah, but she must!

She turned from the glass, and the picture of her father caught her eye. She looked at it for an instant in a sort of dismay. Had he known to what he was sacrificing her to assume that burden? He must have. Had he remembered that she was only a girl, not a hard-jawed man to face the world and conquer it? She had been so close to him. He had loved her as his daughter, and he had admired her as a woman. He, who had known women so well, must have understood the strain of the task on her.

"Ah, sir, sir, it was a hard thing!" She spoke straightly to the picture, dropping into the simple Irishry of her father's speech, "and I only a slip of a girl."

She kept looking, in unconscious reproach, at the great, daring face that looked back at her with eagle's eyes, and she was very near the point of tears, had she known it. And the old feeling she had often had, when he was alive, came back to her from the paint and canvas, and the artist's subtle genius—that here was a man who was wise as Solomon the Jew is reputed to have been. A queer thought came to her that in his instructions something had been lacking, something that was very essential to his scheme and that she must discover.

"I'm foolish," she told herself. She laughed. "I'm like the rightful heir looking for the lost will."

"I'm sorry, dear," she said, bravely, as though he were in the room by her. "I just lost courage for an instant. It's over now. Please forgive me."

But the thought, the feeling, would persist, what

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

if Angus was holding something from her? Pshaw! she laughed at herself. Women's vapors! And yet—she would ask Angus. How ridiculous! Wake up, Derry, my dear! But all the same—perhaps—

II

For a long time now, she sensed, since a little after her father had died, a strange feeling had grown up between herself and Angus, a feeling of strain, of artificial aloofness, a something that was like a queer antagonism.

"But why?" she would often speculate. "What is wrong?"

Nothing that she could see. He watched over her welfare, as a physician over his patient's. Very like a bulwark he stood between her and harm. No matter what befell her, she could call on him, she knew, and from the uttermost ends of the earth he would come to her to protect her. Fair-haired, bronze-faced, with his terrific chest and shoulders, he would lumber through her difficulties like an engine of war, reducing them to powder. Intensely loyal, cruelly blunt, she admired him above all men. To the business men who had dealings with him he was merely a just, iron executive, whose nod of the head was as good as another man's sworn word, who "delivered the goods," as the homely phrase went. Not more than a year ago, before this strange canker had set in among the operatives, he had been in the shipyard a sort of demigod to the men. Very just, and a little more human than the "old man," Shane Butler Keogh.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

There were stories about him in the yards to which he never referred, but which her father had told her with his great laugh, and his "By God! Thon's a man!"—stories which had made her catch her breath. There had been the thing he did for Johnson, the fitter, who was one of their best men. Johnson had been falling down on his record steadily. Campbell went for him like a hurricane.

"What the hell's wrong with you?" he bawled at him. "You're not drinking. You're not sick. You got a wife and four kids. Damn you! Do you want me to fire you?"

The fitter looked at him with haggard eyes.

"Come here, I want to talk to you." He led him into a private office. "Now out with it, Johnson. You and I have known each other for five years." His voice grew very sincere. "Let's get this thing right."

"It's this way, Mr. Angus," the fitter told him, "when the wife was having the third kid . . ."

That afternoon Campbell went down-town. He was pleased and polite and very gentle, "purring like a cat with a saucer of cream in front of her," old Shane had described him. He dropped into the office of a lawyer of the meaner sort, a drab and scrofulous-looking man with reptilian eyes.

"You see, Mr. Kemp," he said, pleasantly, "we have an office rule about the financial difficulties of the men. We insist that their indebtedness be paid in full." He smiled pleasantly. A very genial young man, Kemp decided. "It makes for the building up of character." A very reasonable one, too, Kemp decided—one who would go far. "I deplore the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

necessity of his coming to you, but now the thing's done. I want you to get your deserts. May I see the notes—a mere formality." The shark got them from his safe. Campbell thumbed them over—crossed to the window—tore them into minute pieces—threw them into the street.

"Mr. Campbell! Mr. Campbell!" the loan shark shrieked.

"You stinking offal!" Campbell's voice was low and compelling. "You putridity! I came in here to give you what you earned." He came over and looked Kemp in the eye. "I came in here to break every bone in your rotten carcass. I didn't know you were such a furry little snail then." The man's teeth were chattering. "Now listen to me, you. If I get you sharking any of my men I'll have you tarred and feathered and run out of this town. You know me now, don't you? Well, remember." He walked to the door. He turned around and lifted a chair as though it were a walking-stick. "Christ! I've got a good mind to knock your brains out!" he growled. He went out. The thing ended there.

The yard knew of that incident, because Johnson was too grateful to keep his mouth shut, despite Campbell's instructions. They set their backs to their work. They had a man for a boss, they felt, and if they could put nothing over on him, by God! they said, he would let nobody put anything over on them. And then there was another incident that tickled their broad sense of humor. A landlord in the tenement section had decreed a twenty per cent. raise in rents, taking advantage of the increased activity at the shipyards. Campbell had met him in

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

the housing district, whether by accident or design the yards never knew, but it preferred to believe by design.

"What's this I hear about you raising the rents all around, Ferguson?" Campbell demanded.

"Times is hard, Mr. Campbell," Ferguson whined.
"And improvements—"

"You know blastedly well that times aren't hard, and you haven't put an improvement in in ten years. Now, listen, you! If you persist in this, the men in our place will half murder you. They're a tough crowd, I warn you. And you'll get no sympathy from us."

"The police." Ferguson smiled smugly. "It's their duty to see me protected."

A patrolman was coming down the block. Campbell caught the landlord's throat and shook the breath from him.

"Jim," he called to the policeman. "What am I doing to my friend here?"

"I don't know, Mr. Campbell." The policeman was puzzled at the scene. He noticed Angus's smile. "Shaking hands with him, I guess."

"I'm shaking hands with him." Campbell rocked the man back and forward until his teeth chattered. "And I'm advising him very gently, as you see, Jim, to raise no rents around here." He closed his thumb and finger on Ferguson's larynx. The eyes bulged in the man's head. "He'll take this advice, from friend to friend. Ah yes, he will. I know it."

He did. But the workmen cackled and haw-hawed in glee as they retailed the story.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"‘I’m shaking hands with him,’ he says, and with that he nearly pulls the thrapple out of him. . . .”

A few of them tried to thank him for stepping in.

“We want you to know, Mr. Angus,” they said, “how we appreciate your persuading Ferguson. . . .”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Angus barked. “Get to hell out of here!”

“He has a taking way with him,” old Shane chuckled. “Derith, there’s a man!”

These things an employer might have done, having in mind the fact that to get the best work out of an operative the operative should have no bothers on his mind; should be free to devote every ounce of concentration to the work. Of course that did not occur to the men. It was just Angus’s innate decency, they decided. “He’s all right, he is!” They phrased it, simply. But it required something more than that to win their devotion. And Angus, unwittingly, stumbled across and did that thing.

He had let Chris Bellinger, the heavyweight boxer, off work to train for the championship of New England. A day or so before the fight, at Bridgeport, he dropped into the boxer’s training-quarters.

“How do you feel, Chris?”

“Fine as silk, Mr. Angus,” Bellinger grinned. “I can bring home the bacon against that Irish Wop any time. If I get a square deal—”

“How do you mean, a square deal?”

“Well, it’s this way, Mr. Campbell,” Chris’s manager broke in, “Leo Murphy’s manager owns the club down there, and he’s refereeing the fight. The boys up at the shipyard have put a pile on Chris here, and the Bridgeport gang have covered it.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Now Murphy's manager, Benny Shipman, is a bum sport and a bad guy. And if he can do it—and he can get away with murder in his own place—he may give Chris a short count and Murphy a long one. Or rule Chris out on a foul—”

“I think I'll be there,” Campbell said.

“Will you? Will you, honest, Mr. Angus?” The heavyweight's worried expression gave way to ecstasy. “It's all right, Mac!” he told the manager. “Oh, boy!”

Campbell climbed into the ring before the main bout and walked over to Shipman. He looked the weasel-eyed fight-promoter straight in the face.

“I'm Campbell,” he told him. “Manager of the Keogh Shipyard, where Bellinger works. I'm here to see that Bellinger gets a square deal.”

“Of course he gets a square deal.”

“That's what I'm to see,” Campbell purred. “Now see here, Shipman. In my vest pocket I've got a stop-watch. In my hip pocket a gun—”

“Say, I don't care who in hell you are—” Shipman snapped. “You'll get the bum's rush in a minute.”

Angus turned around. The New River contingent, half the house, recognized him, and a roar of applause went up. Shipman paled a bit.

“Of course, Mr. Campbell, he'll get a square deal.”

“—and the moment I see anything crooked I'm going to drop you with one shell in the shoulder and another in the hip. And listen, you, too, that goes for you,” he told the timekeeper. “Oh, I don't care about the consequences,” he laughed. “I'm not your kind. Now go ahead with the fight.”

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

It was short. The clash of a gong, and Bellinger stepped out to meet the swarthy Italian. They circled about warily, the boards creaking beneath their feet. Light taps to head and body. Cautious sparring. A vicious rush. A half-minute's infighting. The house settled down for a long bout. There were only fourteen seconds left to go of the round.

Suddenly Bellinger feinted with the right hand. He slid in feinting with his left. He pivoted on the ball of his left foot. His right hand snapped home to the jaw like a thunderbolt. The Italian crumpled to the floor like a punctured balloon. The house roared like a hurricane, became dramatically silent.

"One . . . two . . ." Shipman began counting. If he could extend the count of ten seconds over fifteen, the round would end and his man would have a full minute in which to recover. "Three . . . four . . ." He heard the sharp click of a revolver, and for an infinitesimal second his dark Oriental eyes gazed into the grayish steel ones of Campbell.

"Five . . . six . . . seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . out!" he counted crisply. The house roared like a great sea. Bellinger had won.

"He'd have done it, too," was the consensus of opinion in laboring circles. "He'd have shot him. Jail? I should say not! Do you mean to tell me they'd have jailed Angus Campbell for shooting a full house of Shipmans? Listen, Jack. They'd have taken him down to police headquarters and passed him a vote of thanks. Well, I should say so."

And now he who had been loved shyly and feared and honored mightily by the iron men who made

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

her father's ships was disregarded somehow by them. Between him and them there was antagonism. Not the same antagonism existing between him and her, but a hard, material one. And yet he hadn't changed one iota. How was it? she asked. It never occurred to her that she was the disrupting influence—that when he was chief authority under old Shane, who never meddled with his routine, the men were contented and proud to work under him. But now she had come, and their energies were basely turned to finding out how much they could squeeze from her. But Angus and she were so far apart that she could not see that. . . .

III

Yes, she pondered, in that year they had gone very far apart. In those old days the men had seen one side of him. A loved and honored executive. Her father had known the trusted foster-son, but Derith had the faculty of uncovering another facet. To her he would occasionally talk of things other than sport or work. He would speak of things he had read and admired. He would sit by the fireplace in the New River house, watching the logs sputter and flash, and occasionally quote from Mr. Kipling's poem, "MacAndrew's Hymn." Or mention Mr. Masefield's verse. Over him he would become enthusiastic.

"When I think, Derry," he would explode, "of that slush some suburban poetette wrote about the mills or the workshops—the thing we were laughing over—and compare it to any he-poet's:

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"An' Bill can have my sea-boots, Nigger Jim can have my knife,
You can divvy up the whack I haven't scofft,
An' the ship can have my blessing and the Lord can have my life,
For it's time I quit the deck and went aloft."

He would always be silent and a bit ashamed after an outburst like that. "I hate to make a fool of myself," he would growl. "At my age, quoting poetry!" And Derry would smile at him. She understood him so well.

She used to twit him in the evenings about his curious passion for wild West stories such as messenger-boys are popularly supposed to read: *The Fakir of Phantom Flats*, *The Leashed Hunter*, *Eagle-eyed Zeke*. He had a marvelous collection and enjoyed them tremendously. And *Big-hearted Joe* and *The Panther Paleface* would make his eyes glisten.

"I like them," he would tell her flat-footedly. "That's all there is to it. Can't a man read what he likes?"

How she wished he were back again sitting at the fire, smoking that brier pipe of his, all burned down one side, and arguing passionately his likes and dislikes.

"How you can stand burlesque shows," Derith would attack him, "is more than I can conceive. You who were so wild about D'Annunzio's 'Dead City' when you touched at Rome—"

"Listen, Derry," he would explain, patiently. "I like them because they're native art. Any one who hasn't seen Billy Watson's 'Beef Trust,' or

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

'The Golden Crook,' or watched Harry Cohen, has still something to live for."

"But they're revolting."

"Oh, they are, are they? Have you ever seen one? No! Then what the dickens is your opinion worth?"

The house was very lonely now, which had once been joyous and full. Her father was dead. Her brother married. And this queer, strange thing had sprung up between Angus and her. Did she wish they could all be back again? Hardly, she thought, for her father deserved his rest. He had gone his appointed way, as the tawny leaves of autumn go into the crispness of winter. Everything of him had been rounded out, artistically finished. It was good for him, she thought, awesomely, to be dead. Her brother John? She would have been happy with him away, had he been married as he should have been, to some healthy, merry, home-loving girl. And he would not have been missed, for that, too, would have been natural. A man goes from under his father's roof and marries and makes a home for his wife. But she missed Angus. She was lonely in her big house, and he, too, must be lonely in his rooms. She smiled . . . she wished he were back—he and his flute.

The man in him she looked up to; the strange inner quality that made him dream of sunlit seas and dolphins playing at the bows of brigantines—that she appreciated as she would appreciate a great tree or a perfumed Southern wind; the child in him she loved, the thing that made him read *The Madman of the Oconto* and *Brimstone Jake*, and made him patronize "The Sporting Widows" and "Kraus-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

meyer's Alley," but the line had to be drawn somewhere, and the line was at playing the flute.

"O Lord!" she laughed.

For his playing of the flute was the most execrable and inharmonious thing it were possible to imagine. He took it very seriously and had no idea how really villainous it was. He had contracted a habit of bringing the vile thing up to the house and asking Derith to accompany him on the piano. A few bars and her father would rise and go. She could almost hear him as he went by.

"Good God! Good God Almighty! Good God!" The old sailing-captain was aghast with horror.

And John, too, John would follow his father out with pain all over his countenance, such an expression as an intelligent dog wears when it raises its head and howls at certain organ-grinders. In a little while Derith herself would be overcome. She would drop her arms on the keyboard and her head on her arms and laugh like a hysterical school-girl.

"What's wrong?" Angus would ask.

"The flute! The flute!" she would gasp. And laugh until her breath gave out.

"I can't see anything wrong with a flute," he would utter, seriously. "In New York Georges Barrère received a tremendous ovation when he played. And I consider," he would sneer, "that New York has as excellent taste in the line of music as New River, any day in the week."

She had never had the courage to tell him that in any intelligent community his playing of the flute would rank with murders of the more brutal kind, and be treated accordingly. She merely

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

came to and wiped her eyes and listened to his tirade.

"I have no patience with this tone-color stuff on grand pianos. Give me simple, pure music on the old-fashioned instruments—the flute, the bagpipe, the harpsichord."

If things were only as they had been between them, he could bring a xylophone up to the house, or an oompah-oompah, or the Scottish war-pipes, and play them to his heart's content. He could bring a fife-and-drum band, if he wanted to, provided only he came and resumed the normal trend of things.

How had things been? She examined herself. They had been great comrades; free, hearty, unrestrained. There was none with whom she would rather be at any time. It was just comradeship, she told herself. That there was anything deeper to it she never imagined. Or that this estrangement, this uncertainty, this semi-antagonism, was as natural as rain or sunshine she was too much of a novice of life to understand. The birds in the trees knew the secret, and the belling deer in the leafy woods—the intelligible, inexplicable thing that brings the heavens together crashing in thunder and lightning. And then comes sunshine and peaceful weather. . . .

IV

He came into her office, as she called it—that mellow room with the Spanish sea-chest and the great Florentine table, the flowers and the pictures of heeling ships. He took the letter she proffered him

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

without a word on either side, and, sinking his hulk into a leather chair, studied it with knitted brows. He handed it back.

"Angus, I don't like John's going into this brokerage business. I hate it."

"There's nothing to be done, Derry," he said. "I've gone over the problem of John time and time again. He's got to go ahead as he wills or as she wills. The only thing to do is to stand by until the crash comes, then jump in and help."

"I hate to think of a crash."

"It's the only way out, Derry."

"Tell me, Angus"—she turned to him—"tell me, how do you know there's going to be a crash?"

"I know it, Derry." He was very emphatic, very certain. "I know it because everything is wrong. You remember that picture you bought in New York from that oily German with the French name—what was it? I forget—the thing that was all new art. It was the wrong shape, the wrong colors. It was evil. I knew you would soon junk it. And you did. And this thing of John's is wrong, everything wrong. And it must end. Derry, it's inevitable."

She was silent. She knew he was right.

"And when the time comes, don't worry. We'll fish John out and set him on his feet. In the mean time you've got enough on your hands to keep you busy. What about the workmen? They'll be wanting to know your decisions about those reforms you projected."

"I don't know what to do," she wavered. "I'm a bit afraid of going too far. And, on the other hand, I'm afraid of not being fair. I don't know."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"There's one thing you can always do." He looked at her seriously. "Give me full power to treat with them, as your father used to do, and I'll settle everything mighty quickly."

"I know, Angus," she said. "You'd get them down to a basis of sound common sense. You'd handle them. They'd be satisfied. But where would there be any progress, any lasting content? No, Angus. I've to work this out for myself."

He shrugged his shoulders. Always the same discussion. Always the same answer. And while he was inactive, bound, and she was tender and dreaming, Trevelyan, the agitator, was around the corner, active, far-seeing, implacable. What in hell was to be the outcome of the whole affair? he asked himself, silently, savagely. Ruin. That was all.

She turned on him, embarrassed, uncertain, as though she were ashamed of the question she was about to ask.

"Angus," she said. "Was there anything my father said to you that he didn't tell me? Any instructions? Any plan?"

"I don't quite understand," he answered.

"There is so much to do." She was gaining confidence. "So many troubles, such a murky seaway ahead, that I feel as if my father, who is dead, would not have wished me to go on feeling a little lost. I thought perhaps there might have been something he had forgotten to tell me, on the night he died. And that you might have known of it, Angus. He was such a wise man!"

Campbell looked at her keenly and turned his head away. Only too clearly could he remember

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

speaking to Shane Butler Keogh, one autumn afternoon in the shipyards, looking the old ship-builder straight in the eye:

"I would like to marry your daughter, sir."

"You would, would you?" The old sailor had smiled. "And I'm not so certain that I wouldn't like you to, myself." And then the afterthought, "She's got a lot of money."

"I can't help that," Angus had remembered saying.

"No, you can't help that. No, by God! you can't help that. But you can help her!"

"Think, Angus, is there anything he said?" Derith was pleading. Intently Campbell studied her. No, there was nothing in her mind as regards marriage, no idea, no intuition. She was thinking of some friend of her father's to whom she could go for advice. Some one who was close to the old man's ideals. Or of some letter he might have written to be opened in desperate days.

Should he tell her now? No! he decided instinctively. If he did, she would marry him, to follow out her father's plans, dutifully. And he wanted nothing of that kind.

"Are you sure, Angus? Don't you remember anything?"

If he married Derith Keogh, he would marry her because he loved her and she loved him. Love her he did, and too much to have her join with him except with blossoming heart. No, he would wait, he decided wisely, until the time came when her mind would be clear and he could woo her then, in the peace and happiness that is a girl's right in the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

springtime of love. Or until she would need him, so terribly that her bleeding heart would call agonizedly for help, and then he would come and take her in his arms, to her predestined place, and she would be happy there and peaceful as a child at its mother's breast. But in this turbulence he would not have her, when her mind was so disturbed and her soul wavering. She was not like most women, who were only too eager to shift their burdens on to a man's shoulders. She wanted to fight her own battles herself—to win or go down. This was only a momentary weakness of hers—and he loved her the more for it, because she was human, not one of those terrible superwomen whom men admire, but do not love, such as Catherine of Russia was, or the Roman matrons who were figures of steel, more than flesh and blood and fresh emotion.

"There was nothing? Are you sure?"

"Nothing, Derry." He lied bravely. "Nothing. Nothing at all."

"Oh!" She turned from him, ashamed now to have shown any weakness. She fussed among the papers on the table to hide her disappointment. She drew one out, making a fine pretense of business.

"Angus," she essayed, crisply, "I don't meddle at all in the details of business, but there's something here that puzzles me. You've got a secret fund, a pretty large one, too. Nobody seems to know anything about it. You administer it alone. What is it for?"

"That's a secret fund, Derry. That's all there's to it."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"But I don't understand," she followed up. "It's not a 'slush fund,' is it?" She reddened indignantly. "It's not for espionage on other yards or on the men?"

"You bet your life it's not." He was as indignant as she. "Look here, Derry. I once broadly outlined to your father what that was for. Our agreement was never to refer to it again. If your father were alive to-day and were to ask me about it, I would frankly tell him that that was my business, not his!"

None knew about those funds, except Angus Campbell and the men to whom the money went, such as Mackay, the little draftsman who had contracted a spot on his lung and was now somewhere in Nevada, fighting for a cure; such as Dirker, the marine architect, who had been dissipating after some personal trouble, and whom Campbell had promptly piled on board a liner for Buenos Ayres—too good a man to allow go to the dogs. There was always a lift-up for any of the workmen who found the family expenses a trifle too hard sledding. These affairs Campbell nosed out for himself. He saw everything in the yards.

"Now understand"—he would tear a check from the book and look the man straight in the eye—"this is not charity. This business concern is a friend of its men and its men's families. It's the privilege of a friend to help a man over a rough place. There's only one iron-bound condition to this—keep your mouth shut. Forget it."

"But it seems to me," Derith said, a little petulantly, "that as it is my money, I have a right to

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

know what you're doing with it." She was honestly curious. She wanted to nose out his secret.

"Of course you have," Angus told her. "Of course you have. But you're not going to. That's all."

Because he cared for her and because he had to renounce her for a time, some strange quirk made him half brutal toward her. Had he been indifferent to her, he would have treated her with tact, with evasive courtesy. Had their hour of happiness come he would have been glad to impart the secret, as being one other thing to bind them, heart and soul, one more thing to share. But as yet there was only emotional turmoil and uncertainty. . . . Until they should be as one, there would be still this gulf between them, this maddening darkness, in which they were only two atoms, now tantalizingly near, now petulantly distant, some day to join and be whole, but as yet whirling nowhither, playthings of the furious stars. . . .

v

What was wrong with Angus? she asked, when he had left her. It was not that he had said so much, not what he had unsaid, either, but a strange feeling she had about him that worried her. He was concealing something. What was it?

Was he angry with her? Had she done something that annoyed him? That was hardly likely. If she had, he would have told her in his blunt, natural way. But he had said nothing.

"I wonder!" Her heart stopped beating for a

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

moment. There was, of course, only one thing that could have made him so distant, somehow secretive. She remembered John. Could Angus be going to marry? Could he?

"Angus! Marry!" That seemed impossible. Angus! She tried to laugh. But why shouldn't he? A man did. But Angus marry! "It seemed so indecent—" She shuddered.

Who could it be? Patricia Raines? Men thought her good-looking with her fair hair and blue eyes, now very babyish, now provocative. "A slut," Derith thought, savagely, remembering her at school. Or Aimée Travers, buxom, housewifely, comely in a fireside way? "A cook!" Derith hardly recognized herself. She had become so uncharitable, so nearly shrewish. Or could it be Sappho Dunscombe, tall, black-haired, Amazonian, surrounded by dogs and horses, tennis champions, footballers? Sappho had been one of Derith's best friends. She had liked the out-of-doors sportswoman, but now she felt she hated her, hated her intensely.

"Angus! Marry!" There came to her the thought of him with a wife, and she flushed red at the vision of him intimate toward one.

To imagine, for an instant, him undressing in a room with a woman. . . . She caught her breath. It was so degrading. She felt vicarious shame for him. Surely it couldn't be love. He was so fine, so straight, so of the sea, she could imagine no mate worthy of him.

"And yet it must be."

She put her head suddenly between her hands and cried.

CHAPTER XV

I

"SO you see, Miss Keogh, the position in which you place us."

Harriman, the silk manufacturer of New Bedford, leaned forward, suave, fat, bald-headed. His eyes were small, his face pink from daily massage. His hands were fat and manicured, and on his ring finger was the crest of the Irish Earls of Lucan. His father had been an honest Swiss bourgeois, with a small business on lower Broadway. But *The United States Magazine* had called him a prince of commerce in its article "The Executive of a Thousand Smiles," and Harriman had arrogated to himself some of the trappings of nobility—such as the crest of the Sarsfields, the arms of the de Rohans, and a taste for Waterford glass. He would have been very happy could he have received some foreign order. That was his heart's ambition. He had thought secretly even of going across to the Church of Rome, and by dint of magnificent donations, later on, of course, when his fortune had reached the proportions it undoubtedly would . . . Count Harriman!

"You see," he continued, "how hard it is. You put in such innovations as an old-age pension scheme, an eight-hour day. You drop the system of scientific

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

management for the antiquated trades-unionism. Our men come and demand these benefits from us. They point out that they are in practice at the Keogh Shipyards when we refuse them. And labor is in a bad temper now; it's weak to give in—”

“It's damned foolish,” boomed Ross, of the Ross Steel Plant, who with Braithwaite, the cotton baron, as they called him, a beefy Lancashire man, had come along to give “that fool woman a trimming down.” Ross, blunt, gray-bearded, Scots to the backbone, Derith liked the most.

“Now, now, Mr. Ross,” Harriman purred. “If you will pardon me, my dear young lady, you are betraying your class, as it were. We must all stick together in these dangerous times. It is only out of regard for your welfare, your own welfare, I speak—”

Which was very much of a lie. But Harriman had been pleasantly shocked at the sight of Derith Keogh. He had expected a flabby, weak type of woman, past marriageable age—else she should have been married. He had found her young; white, straight, and lithe as a dagger; a proud, steadfast gaze from her great gray eyes. She only needed a coronet on the piled silken hair to make her his ideal of beauty.

“The whole thing is,” Braithwaite snarled, “we won't stand for this bloody foolishness. The American workman is spoiled by you and your like—”

“Are you speaking to me?” Derith looked at the Lancashire man steadily. He was beside himself with rage. His beefy face was purple. His ragged yellow mustache bristled like a hedgehog's quills.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Of course I'm talking to you."

"Braithwaite! Braithwaite!" Harriman stood up.

"One moment, Mr. Harriman!" Derith was leaning over the table with her finger poised to touch a button. "If you address another word in that strain to me one of my American workmen will have the serene pleasure of kicking you from one end of this town to the other." Her father was blazing in her eyes. "And they kick very hard, my men do." The cotton man gulped, slumped, went a little white. Old Sandy Ross grinned in his beard, nodded his head appreciatively. Harriman looked at her with new respect.

"Now, Miss Keogh," Harriman went on, "you must really take a little advice. We are old ring generals in the arena of business. We three—I may say without boasting, merely as a matter of fact—have been unqualified successes. Now, my dear young lady, our experience has been that, to get the best out of the working-man, one must discipline him, as soldiers in an army are disciplined—"

"A moment, Mr. Harriman," Derith broke in. "I would like to have your idea of what success is."

"Why, success, of course!" Harriman was puzzled. "Success is success. It is clear."

"It is." Derith was taking in the fine broadcloth of his morning clothes, the massaged face, the fingernails shiny as a chorus-girl's. "Now, Mr. Harriman, I want to tell you something. My father, Shane Butler Keogh," her voice rang proudly—and even the beefy Lancashire man nodded his head in tribute—"held marked ideas about business. He looked upon business as a benevolent feudalism."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Very true. Very true indeed." Harriman nodded. The figure pleased him.

"But he held also that the responsibilities of the commercial overlord were onerous and wide. They embraced every phase of the worker's welfare, outside of his private moral affairs."

"That's going very far," Harriman objected.

"I hold the same, Mr. Harriman. You see"—she smiled a winsome apology—"I don't want you to think I am preaching or philosophizing. I am merely the mouthpiece of my father, Shane Butler Keogh, who is dead. You look on labor as property, and we, my father who is dead and I, do not. They are human beings, some frail, some strong. In the main just as we are, mortal body and living soul. You know that hackneyed, cheapened thing called the Golden Rule. There's a lot to that, you know."

"H'm! Well!" Harriman was at sea. He had come to talk about business principles. He was being lectured on commercial morality. And that by a girl in her early twenties who smiled at him like sunshine and appealed to him prettily with a gesture of flexible white hands. She turned to Sandy Ross.

"Mr. Ross," she asked, "you have been a workman yourself. What do you think of all this?"

The old Scot had been watching her a little pathetically. He had no children. He had nothing but his works. But if he ever had had a daughter, she ought to have been like Shane's—

"Your father," he said, half irrelevantly—"your father was a good man." She waited an instant. "Ay! As you said, lassie, I've been a working-man, and the school I was raised in was a gey hard one.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

It was keep alive or die and be dinged to you. There was unco big prizes at the top, if you could get there. A fight, ye ken, very hard, very tough. Well, I fought."

"Now, Mr. Ross," Derith met him squarely, "I ask you: is that any pattern of life worth living?"

"Lassie, I'll tell ye straight. I fought hard to get what I have, and I'm going to keep it. That's how I was raised. The hard, old school, ye ken. I'm no against reforms, I'll have you to understand, though there was mickle reforms in my day. But I'll gie ye a bit advice." He tapped the table with his broad, scarred forefinger. "Ca' canny. Ca' canny."

Derith was bewildered.

"Go easy!" the old man translated. "But ye winna do that, being a bit lassie, and young to boot. I know you. I knew your father. You'll gang your ain gait."

"Well, Miss Keogh?" Harriman asked, briskly.

"I'm sorry," Derith said, simply. "I can't see it as you do. I must do what I think is right."

"I am chagrined," the silk manufacturer complained. "Deeply chagrined."

"And I, too"—she laid her hand on his arm winningly—"that you can't see it as I do. For, believe me, mine is the better way."

The old Scot stopped as they went out.

"And how," he asked, benevolently, "is your brither hitting the wee ba'?"

"I don't think he's doing much golf this season," she answered, troubled-like.

"A pity." Ross shook his gray head. "A grand gowfer him!"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

They went off, Harriman very much *en grand seigneur*, dismissed by a princess, suave, courtly, but a little dejected; Braithwaite, sullen, savage, with a red light in his eye, such as is occasionally seen in pigs' eyes at a certain angle. He would like to have trampled her bonny head out of recognition under his tremendous boots—and would have, too, one felt, if he could escape the consequences. Ross was very simple, with the dignity of age. He turned at the door.

"I hope you won't be disappointed, wee lassie," was his good-by to her. "But I'm afeared, I'm gey afeared."

She had wished Angus to be present at the interview. He had refused bluntly.

"Your business is your business. But your reforms are your hobby. I've told you before what I think of them. They're expensive, unnecessary, and demoralizing to the men. As far as these men go, there's only one of them worth a tinker's curse, and that's old Sandy Ross. If you want to know what you should say to them, it's this: Mind your own damned business!"

He came in five minutes after they had gone. There were savagery in his manner and a glint of barbaric joy in his eye.

"I'm sorry, Derry." He was grinning. "But one of your guests has had an accident."

"Who? What?"

"Your friend Braithwaite began to say what he thought of you on the way out through the yards—"

"What did he say?"

"Nothing for you to hear." Angus was red with

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

anger again. The dog had spoken in the tongue of the lupanar. "Bonaparte Jones, the big colored riveter, heard him, and broke his nose, palate, and jaw with one wallop. At that he only beat me to it by five seconds. If you come down-stairs, Derry, you can see the whole thing. Old Sandy Ross is damning Braithwaite in the finest Biblical I ever heard. And Harriman is explaining to the men that he never approved of Braithwaite. And Braithwaite's being carried off on a door. God!" He forgot about Derith's presence and swore as he hadn't sworn since his second-mate days. "One belt at that putrid merchant and I'd have died happy . . ."

She was standing up proudly.

"You were wrong, Angus," her voice rang; "my men are loyal."

"They were always loyal, Derry." Angus had become very serious. "They would have died at the stake for you a year ago, without any thought of reward. They defend you now because you are generous to them. But in a year, Derry, in another year . . ."

II

Trevelyan leaned back calmly. He watched Dolan's face.

"Ansell says he was outside at the door all the time that Ross and Harriman and Braithwaite were there. And she said, as they went, that she was going to stick to her principles. Then they came out. They said nothing. Ansell couldn't see their faces. He was supposed to be mending an electric-light socket.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

That's all. And then Braithwaite got clouted by the coon riveter below."

"H'm!" Trevelyan thought a minute. They had gathered at their favorite meeting-place—the John Street saloon, Trevelyan and his lieutenant, Jim Dolan, the hired agitator; Morel, the Austrian; Krischenko, the pallid, fanatic Russian. The three fuglemen seemed in their correct atmosphere in the fetid back room, with the tin advertisements and the brassy cupidors and the stale and acrid cigarette smoke. Trevelyan seemed dramatically out of place, with his ascetic bronzed face, his contemptuous eyes. They hated him, did Dolan and Morel, as did many another leader, but they needed him and they were afraid of him. A word from Trevelyan and a mob would have torn them asunder, but they hated him for his cleanliness and contempt of them. And Krischenko, the fanatic, understood him and was sorry for him, and not a little awe-stricken.

"Well, Bum?" Dolan was leaning eagerly toward him.

"Get the correspondents of the intellectual labor papers and have them write of the interview. The points I want them to make are the points made by Miss Keogh herself." Dolan seemed disappointed. "Dignify it into the nature of a set conference."

"Is that all?"

"No!" The Hunts Point Bum drawled insultingly. "It is not all. To the workers at Braithwaite's, at Harriman's, and at Ross's the word must go that Miss Keogh pleaded it was unsafe not to grant their demands, and that it was the only way of staving off revolution. But the others were

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

obdurate, do you see? Harriman said if the worst came to the worst he would lock his men out. Ross said he had his men too much under his thumb for them to make any trouble. As for Braithwaite, report that Braithwaite swore that at the first show of trouble he would have the militia there with bayonets. By the way, there's a picture in the supplement of a New York paper of troops in riot formation with fixed bayonets. Have that copied at headquarters and distributed around the Braithwaite plant."

Krischenko smiled appreciatively. Morel chuckled.
"About the coon hitting Braithwaite?"

"Not a word about that! Here, at any rate." It didn't suit Trevelyan's plans to have men chivalrous toward their employers. "Kill that story as far as possible. At the other plants, the thing is to say that Braithwaite cursed one of the proletariat as he was coming out and that the men beat him up. Also that Braithwaite was too afraid to take any action. Miss Keogh, also, was afraid to fire the man. That fits the case."

Again the trio grinned. God! they chuckled in admiration, the Bum was the one who knew how to turn things to their advantage; points which phased them, which appeared to them palpable defeats, by simple strategy he turned to their favor. But Dolan was unsatisfied.

"What about a little action?" he queried. "I think it's about time to start something. In the fruit-growing districts you had—" Trevelyan's eyes snapped at him. He wavered an instant and corrected himself. "In the fruit-growing district there

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

was an order given to drive a copper nail into every tree, and the trees are ruined. Now here—”

“No.”

“I can get a bunch of wobblies into the yards. How about a little emery powder—”

“I often wonder, Dolan,” Trevelyan’s voice cut in in ridicule, “what part of your anatomy you think with. Is it that broken nose of yours, or those shapely feet? God! You are a beauty, aren’t you? How the devil you ever escaped the dullest cop on the beat is more than I know. And you’ve been taking money to agitate labor problems. It would have been more honest for you to steal it from an organ-grinder’s monkey. More in your line of work, too.” Trevelyan was laughing quietly. Dolan was red to the eyes. “Dolan, can you even read? I’ve seen you handling a newspaper right side up, but I think you’re just bluffing.” His face changed from the banter of ridicule to a stern, set quality, and the change was very terrible to see. “Listen, you dog”—his voice snapped like a trainer’s whip—“if you dare to cross me, I’ll break you like a rotten twig.” In the room was silence like death. Dolan sat back, white and broken.

“And now that this conference has been fixed”—Trevelyan had resumed his customary drawl—“we must see what we can do further in the matter of the Keogh Shipyards. Krischenko, you’ll have to get busy on propaganda. This megaphone”—he pointed to Dolan contemptuously—“will limber up that throat of his. And you, Morel—”

“Yes, sir,” the Austrian snapped, like a soldier obeying a military command.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"‘Yes, sir,’” Trevelyan mimicked. “You tripe-hound, talk like a man, not liked a kicked pup. Get busy and spread discontent. The Keogh workers want a six-hour day.”

“Too much,” Krischenko broke in.

“You will take this attitude: That there are so many out of employment in various parts of the state, that a six-hour day would give four men employment where now there are only three. A new era is coming in, when men are loyal to one another. How can I eat my bread in peace when my brother is starving in the street? You can do it, Krischenko.”

“And the wages?” Dolan ventured.

“The wages naturally will be the same, since the wage is based entirely on what a man requires to live. On the question of wages we must be adamant. The wages will rise later,” he smiled, “as the two hours more leisure for spending will naturally cut into the income.”

“She won’t give it.” Dolan shook his head.

“It’s up to you to see that she does, Dolan — Trevelyan’s voice resumed its commanding rhythm — “or to turn the yards out. As a matter of fact, I think she will give it. Yes, I am nearly certain she will.”

III

“But we can do it, Angus!”

“I tell you it’s madness, Derry. I’ve never heard as mad a thing in my life. Six hours a day. Pay for eight hours’ work! Woman, have you lost your senses?”

“Look at it squarely, Angus. The men see it in

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

the right way. They must all have work. There is a surplus of unemployed. The six-hour day settles the matter."

"But in business—"

"Angus, you know as well as I do that we can afford it and at the same time receive a perfectly fair return." She looked at him with a calm, indulgent smile. She was happy. The new scheme proposed by the workers seemed fair, feasible, to her. She felt she was making progress, and the enthusiasm removed the vague unrest in her heart for a time. "Look at the work we have on hand—the new mail-boats for the All America line; the contract for the transatlantic seaplanes. You know, Angus, you know we can afford it. Don't talk to me, Angus, as that man Harriman did. Not from you. It hurts."

"It's not business, Derry, I repeat. And, moreover," he looked at her squarely, with conviction in his gray eyes, "you are going to demoralize your men. You are doing them wrong, a great wrong. They will give torchlight processions now, but later, my girl, they will curse you and their wives will curse you and their children will cry in anguish at your name."

"It is you who are mad now, Angus." She looked at him reproachfully. "Dear," she began, using that familiar term of girlhood which she had for Angus and for John and for her father. But now it had not the crisp, casual quality of those days, and the note of sincerity in it made her blush uncertainly and thrilled Angus as the bourdon note of an organ would. "How can you say it would demoral-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

ize when their only object in asking for the change is to help their fellow-workmen? Angus, it's so beautiful."

"Their only object—" Campbell gasped. "Good God! Their only object! I will say no more about it, Derry"—he smiled suddenly—"if you will accede to one thing."

"Yes?"

"There is one man behind all this, Derry. His name is Trevelyan—'the Hunts Point Bum,' the I. W. W. call him. He's the mainspring of the whole agitation. I want you to talk to him. Just you talk to him once and you'll see the motives behind all this. Will you do that for me?"

"I know of him, 'the Messiah of Sabotage.' Of course I'll talk to him. But how can I, Angus? They say his headquarters are at a saloon in John Street. I can hardly go there." She laughed.

"I'll tell you." Angus was eager. "We'll get him up to the house some night. Will you do that, Derry?"

"Why, of course!" she smiled. "I'll write him now."

He left and made his way to his offices below. He entered, whistling. Suddenly he broke into a few steps of a hornpipe.

"You son-of-a-gun!" he chuckled, delightedly. "I've got you now."

He sparred at an imaginary opponent. He fiddled with his left hand an instant or so, and whipped the right across to a hypothetical chin.

"I have you where I want you," he exulted. A thought disconcerted him; replaced his exaltation

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

with a frown. "But maybe he won't come. Blazes! if he doesn't come . . ."

IV

They had come in from the dining-room, Angus Campbell and she, into the mellow drawing-room that Derith loved. It was a trifle cold for May, and in the big fireplace with its crane from Ireland logs were sputtering in minute explosions. The shaded lamps glowed softly here and there; on the bulky piano where the music was ordered in correct piles by a zealous maid, Rachmaninoff and Jerome Kern, Saint-Saëns and Burleigh, a very human agglomeration. "Mercedes Vengochea in Green and Gold" looked down, Castilian, very haughty from the wall. The grandfather's clock with the dull steel face chimed the half-hour after eight. Angus roamed hither and thither through the room, picking up a book and putting it down—*L'Enfer* of Henri Barbusse; a volume of Alan Seeger's poetry; a novel of Somerset Maugham's.

"Don't you think I'd better change to something else?" Derith asked. "To make him feel more at home."

"No," Campbell growled. He looked approvingly at her in her studiously simple dinner frock, a black thing square cut at the neck with a broad edging of gold there, and a gold sash about the waist. From the shoulders her head rose out of it like the head of a medieval page. The sudden whiteness of her neck, her profile with its Milesian winsomeness, her piled hair like a helmet, gave him the feeling he had some-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

times sensed when he had given a moment's attention to the prints of Botticelli. Aloof, remote, inaccessible as the farthest star.

"No," he decided. "No use descending to the Bum's level. Let him be uncomfortable!"

He looked at her approvingly. Her fine, pure line, her slender feet—how much of a lady she was! And as for himself, he nodded; he was all right, too. He had donned a dinner jacket, very simple, somewhat antiquated as to style—the product of a local artist. His shirt-front had a tendency to bulge and his tie was a trifle galley-west, but he hadn't noticed these things. He was too incomplex to worry about styles for men or what suited him. His idea was to make Trevelyan ill at ease; to rouse him to an outburst of hatred by a display of the differences between their classes. It was subtle, he complimented himself. Strategy. That was the word—strategy. Derith divined his idea.

"Angus, you so unkind!" she said. "I'm going to change and make the poor man comfortable. You will do what you like."

"Too late." Angus grinned. The maid appeared at the door.

"Mr. Trevelyan," she announced, with respect.

For a minute Angus's jaw dropped, like a yokel's at the sight of a sky-scraper. And even Derith had a moment of uncertainty. Dressed as meticulously as an actor, and wearing his evening things like a prince, John Trevelyan came into the room. His coat was molded to his fine muscularity. His bosom was broad and shiny with linen. His rather large white bow was perfectly done. As he crossed the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

room there was the flash of silk socks. He bent over Derith's hand.

"It was so good of you to ask me up, Miss Keogh." He went to Campbell and shook hands before Angus knew what was happening. "How do you do, Campbell?" he inquired, warmly.

"You know our manager, then," Derith said.

"Yes, indeed." Trevelyan smiled. "We had a very pleasant time one evening on John Street. Mr. Campbell remembers, I'm sure." He laughed gently.

Campbell remembered only too well, and a flush mounted to his forehead. He saw himself truculently pointing a revolver at Trevelyan while the agitator calmly lighted a cigarette. "I'm playing my game. You're playing yours," Trevelyan had told him. "Why not get me fair?"

"Oh, I'll get you, all right," Campbell remembered himself saying. In that low saloon he had seen only the force of Trevelyan. Now, in Derith Keogh's drawing-room he saw the man's subtlety—the pit that had been digged for him he had used as an ambush.

"You want to talk about the six-hour-day idea, don't you, Miss Keogh?" Trevelyan had seated himself opposite Derith. "I want you to have the courage to grant that!"

"It's so different."

"Yes," Trevelyan nodded, "yes!" He rose silently and leaned on the mantel, looking into the fire. Derith watched him with a sort of fascination. Campbell, puzzled, uneasy, marveled at his poise.

"Yes, it is different." Trevelyan shook his head.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

He looked around the room. The corners of his mouth tightened in a smile that was wry and wistful. "Yes, it is different. Miss Keogh, did you ever see a workman's flat after a period of unemployment? In the good days it's usually furnished on a hire system. Green-plush atrocities; sideboard and tables yellow and shiny, like cheap coffins, and here and there a print or a motto. But it spells a lot to them—a place like that. It is their idea of comfort and wealth. A home, you see!"

He looked at her intensely. She watched him without a word.

"That's all he wants, that home; a little food; his wife and children. Unemployment comes. Little by little such savings as he has goes. Then comes the pawnshop; trinkets, wedding-ring go, lastly his tools. Then the sharks of the hire system come and they take away his furniture. And the place is bare, four dark, bare walls to a room. The man is ashamed. His wife is ashamed. Do you know what shame is, Miss Keogh? Not the sort that makes you drop your head for an instant and blush red! Not the anger you feel against yourself when you have done some one a wrong. But the gray, gray misery that comes into the heart and settles on it, like a dark, cold mist, and one cannot think in it, and one cannot act, for it numbs the body and soul. And even death seems no relief, for you have no optimism, and all you can imagine in another life is a lonely graveyard of draggled mounds, and headstones that are awry, and melancholy, dripping trees. . . . Yes, it is different."

He gave a quick exclamation that was a mixture

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of anger and a sigh. Derith's features had become pale. Campbell even was awed.

Trevelyan's glance went casually about the room. It stopped at the Zuloaga, with its riot of color, its magnificent, barbaric, nearly Moorish quality. For a minute he seemed to be studying the face of the Spaniard's model. Derith followed his eyes. She wondered if he had finished speaking.

"I saw a bared workman's home in Lawrence a few days ago. The furniture ghouls had removed everything but one picture, or a decoration, rather. You have no idea what a dramatic thing it was," he smiled. "Just a motto in great florid letters, red and black, 'God Bless Our Happy Home.'"

"Oh!" Derith's breath was taken in with a sob, as though somebody had cut her with a whip. Trevelyan was merciless. He picked up a book from the table.

"*The Arrow of Gold*," he glanced at the back of it. "The literature the unemployed read," he told her, "is a tale of rather sordid realism; once in a thousand times satisfactory; never ended. Wanted: first-class butcher. Wanted: skilled foundry laborer. Wanted: route man to drive Ford car. United States government wants help. One thousand dollars—one thousand six-hundred dollars a year. Pleasant work. Apply to institute such and such. Wanted: waiter. Nothing there. Better luck to-morrow, they fool themselves, and yet they know in their heart of hearts that to-morrow will be just as blank as to-day."

He came back and leaned against the mantel.

"Yes," he said, slowly. "Different!"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

He looked at Derith for a full minute; looked at her hair, her features, her frock. Noted her slim, well-kept hands. Noted the silk stocking on her ankle; the slender satin shoes. She felt that appraising eye go over her, but what in another man would have made her blush angrily, in him caused her no feeling at all. He was aloof, cold, appraising.

"Miss Keogh," he went on, "if it is like that for the men, what is it for the women! They are raised in poverty, and then comes a little time for dancing and singing, and then is marriage. You would think that the experience of their mothers would teach them something. But it never does. In their hearts there is romance, and faith in the future. They marry and they live unhappily ever after. The possibility, the certainty of unemployment is always by them, like a ghost that sneers. And their husbands come to look at them with something near hatred, remembering the days when there was not a second mouth to fill—and that breaks the heart in two. And anon come children, and they are only more mouths to feed. There is always the terror of having another child. They were young once, these women, just girls, eager for dancing, eager for love. All the health of a solid peasantry in their bodies. A year goes by, and their faces are set, their eyes troubled. In a little while what comeliness they have will be gone, and they will be only broken things—to breed children which capital will use when it sees fit, and the grocer and the pawnbroker and the tenement landlord plunder with piglike, calculating eyes. There is that before

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

them. No youth, no music, no comfort, no beauty, no dreams. Just fear. Fear that makes the sunlight meaningless for them. And for them spring is a drab thing, and winter very terrible. . . . Yes, it is different!"

She was very near sobbing now.

"This house is mellow and very happy," he said to her. "I don't wonder you love it. You were a child here. Here you played with your brother and your friend here, Angus Campbell. There was a governess cart for you, and a Shetland pony. You enjoyed yourselves, and then a nurse cleaned you all up, didn't she? And you made a great noise at dinner in your nursery. You said in your prayers that God was good, and you had distinct evidence of the fact, hadn't you? You went to sleep in warmth and woke to happiness." He paused for an instant and his voice vibrated. "Do you know," he asked, terribly, "that at the age you were playing children are selling papers in the streets, in the cold and slush—ill fed, ill clad, deprived of any happiness of childhood? They are rushing hither and thither with messages and telegrams, stunted in stature, awry in being, disillusioned, dumbly unhappy. They are doing this because their few wretched pennies are needed at home. They go home to a flat where a shamed man and a harassed woman are. There is little love there. Love will not stay where no money is, believe me. Different? O God! How different!"

He had her crying now, dumbly. Her eyes were pained, her mouth quivering at the corners. He stood before her straightly.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Derith Keogh," he asked, "are you going to do something for these women and children?"

She nodded. She could not speak.

"God bless this day!" he said, reverently.

He took his departure with that word, like an actor who cunningly avoids an anticlimax. He bowed silently to her. In a manner of daze Campbell watched him. The Scots manager was a little hypnotized. He had been wrong, after all. Trevelyan was sincere. No man could have spoken or looked that way who did not feel in his heart that his cause was just. He rose as Trevelyan came toward him. Yes, he had been wrong. . . .

Trevelyan made no effort to shake hands. He looked at Angus for an instant. In his eyes was the light of contemptuous triumph.

They watched each other for a full half-minute. Campbell nodded his head bitterly. Yes, he had been beaten. There was nothing to do. To strike the man now, to raise an outcry to Derith, would only make him lose credit, convict him of madness. The man was a superb mummer. A brawling incident he would turn to his advantage. No, that was not the way.

Trevelyan had left the room, still smiling. For a while Campbell was silent, looking after him, while Derith watched the glow of the logs. Yes, he had won that trick, Angus granted. But somehow, somewhere, and soon at that, Trevelyan would stumble, totter, and fall. For the man was wrong, was insincere. There was no ethical foundation to his structure. There was nothing right about

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

him. And that could not last. No, that was certain; an assured thing. . . .

v

For weeks now she worried about Angus Campbell. Since the six-hour-day schedule had been put into effect he seemed to have little interest in the business, doing everything efficiently, of course, but with a perfunctory quality that was wholly unlike him. He had taken on also a smiling, offhand manner such as any satisfied business man might wear, but somehow she would much rather have had him as he was in the old days, quarrelsome, intolerant of her reforms, hard to manage. She questioned him once or twice.

"What is wrong with you, Angus?"

"With me? Nothing."

"But you seem so satisfied!"

"Why shouldn't I be? Everything's all right. Surely you aren't complaining because I'm not dissatisfied." Yes, but she was.

He brought her in a check for eight thousand dollars one morning. He handed it to her across the desk. She questioned him silently.

"That's the balance of that private fund I held. I've decided to discontinue it."

"But why?"

"Well, tell you the truth, Derry, I've sort of lost interest in it. And besides, it's hardly necessary any more."

"You still insist on keeping secret what it was for?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"It would be just as well," he told her. "It was just foolishness. Let's forget it."

"All right," she said. But the incident bothered her greatly. She had a strange premonition that things were going very wrong.

"Do you know, Angus," she said to him, suddenly, "I've got an idea that the men are not putting any snap into the work. There is an atmosphere of listlessness about which I don't like. I wonder if it's imagination on my part or if it's true?"

"It's probably imagination," he answered her. "Surely their sense of gratitude and of loyalty toward you would prevent any such thing." She looked at him keenly, to see if that were said in sarcasm, but his face was impassive. She could not tell. Yes, she was worried. It was unlike Angus to say a thing like that.

Yes, she was worried. An avalanche of incidents, comments, and criticisms had engulfed her since the putting into practice of the six-hour schedule. Even John, her buddy John, had protested.

"I am not so certain, sis," he had written from New York, "that you are doing the right thing. Of course it's hardly up to me to criticize. I'm the drone of the family. And you are on the spot, working hard. And there is Angus to counsel you—" She smiled a little bitterly at that. She wanted Angus to counsel her, not that she had ever followed his advice, but, now that he had ceased, she missed his objections, resented their absence. "Naturally, Jean is savage. She says it's sheer robbery. But Jean's idea is to work the men for all they're worth. Of course, I needn't tell you"—she could

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

feel him a little shamed here—"that we seem to be needing money more and more. Where it goes I don't know. I'm not much on spending, myself—" Of course he wasn't, she approved heartily. John was as simple as a bird. "But it goes. However—Derry dear, are you sure that you're right? Something makes me feel a trifle fearful. A premonition, but, of course, that's nonsense—"

But was it nonsense? she asked. Down in her own heart there was the same dull, gray feeling. The night Trevelyan had spoken all seemed radiant, glorious, sanctified, as it were. But somehow, now—

The press comments had unsettled her. "The dawn of the proletarian era," the organ of the social revolution had proclaimed her reform to be. "The right of leisure is now the working-man's as well as the capitalist's. The time is coming when the millionaire will not have a monopoly of the choice vintages of France or of succulent viands prepared by high-priced chefs. The men who make these things possible are the men to enjoy them. We venture to prophesy a soon day when the former millionaire will gaze at the worker with envy. The victory of the Keogh Shipyards will give a further impetus and a fierce courage to comrades throughout the world. It will give them to understand their strength and at the same time to see the weakness of their enemy. There is in the Talmud a parable of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai's: The egg challenged the stone to battle, and the yolk came out." There was an indecent, unrestrained savagery to this that appalled her. It was somehow like a wolf threatening with bared teeth . . .

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

A New York journal, infamous for its connection with Wall Street pioneers, no longer of weighty importance, lashed at her venomously, like some old courtezan jealous of the well-being of her former master. "What has the country come to when a girl hardly out of her 'teens can all but precipitate a revolution? It is by the actions of such as Miss Keogh that our social fabric is endangered. What are the officers of the present administration mooning over that they can allow this unthinkable insanity? Even under a riotous and licentious democracy, has property no right?" Nothing would have suited the paper better than a libel suit in this connection, which would have impressed it on the public mind as the protector of estate and guardian of society. Bah! Derith laughed—a pawnbroker shrieking at the prospect of his looted kennel!

But a leader in an evening metropolitan daily, noted for its clarity of thought, and with a leaning toward the welfare of the working-man, made her not a trifle uncertain: "While every untrained mind will sympathize with Miss Keogh's ideals, would it not have been better for a reform so radical and of such wide-reaching consequences to have emanated from the chosen executives of the nation, in legal form? The schedule has its undoubtedly excellent points, but, on the other hand, it has such a possibility of demerit, in the social sense. . . ." Had she been, after all, right? she asked herself, seriously.

About the yards she noticed a new spirit, a sort of dangerous arrogance. No longer did they regard her with respectful eyes, as they had done when her father was alive. Nor did they even watch her,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

currying her favor, as they had done a year ago, seeing in her a dispenser of gifts, a person to be treated with a sort of commercial gallantry, as it were. She was negligible. She was no more in their eyes than the pale clerk who counts out bills behind the bars of a bank, obedient to the client's check, his nod and favor. That might be all right, she told herself. Perhaps in the whole scheme of labor she was just as negligible as that. The men were the workers, the producers, she but a checking system on rewards. And yet—awhile ago, there had been great loyalty for her, regard, affection. She missed that. Now she was no more than an ornate envelop in which they received their weekly pay, a channel through which flowed the medium of exchange for bread and circuses. Once she had been like a little queen, her kingdom about her, her subjects devoted and comfortable. Now all who gave tribute to her were, perhaps, some old gaffer in the street, to whom she had been kind in illness, or who had sailed with her father, Shane Butler Keogh; or some young workman, belike, whom her face and bearing had overcome, and who thought about her impossibly, the day's work done, dreaming dreams. . . . Like a neglected wife she seemed to be, who knows her mate's love to be growing cold, which is more bitter than hatred; or as a young girl might feel whose sanctity had been rifled, and who senses her lover growing tired of her, contemptuous toward her, about to desert her. . . . Things had altered strangely. At times life was miserably cold to her and she was utterly lonely, crying a little and secretly in the night, as nuns must do. . . . Even

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Angus her one friend! What had gone wrong with the world, anyway? With her, with John, with Angus, with the men in the yards? And from the depths of herself, or from outside of herself—she knew not which—there came an answer, a premonition of some strange and perhaps lethal illness striking them all; a hideous, distorted microbe working as a spreading cancer in their comity. What was it? Where was it? She asked vainly. And what operation would remove it with swift, ruthless, healing knife-thrust? She threw her hands out in desperation. She did not know.

CHAPTER XVI

I

"SO this is the place! How perfectly delightful!" Jean had brought Olive Stockton and Bonds, the movie actor, out to Harrison in her car. She looked at the big, low-lying bungalow, with its terraced Italian garden, from which the Sound could be seen, a strip of silver water, meandering here and there in little estuaries and crooked, unexpected harbors. "Isn't it cute?" She clapped her hands in a little theatrical gesture she had picked up at a "glad" play.

Very dignified the house lay, nestling like a dun bird in a huddle of apple-trees, now, in mid-May, already a billowing cloud of apple-blossoms. The shy virginal greenness of spring was on the lawns. The lilac-trees along the hedgerows were bursting into firm, graceful torches. Here and there was dogwood, very like stars. Underneath the stone fences violets were showing, like shy young girls. A robin peeped out of a wistaria-vine, chattering about something or other, while across a path a brown rabbit with a dramatic white tail—amusingly indecorous, like a naked baby—scuttled toward the underbrush.

"Isn't it just too sweet for words?" Jean turned to her friends, very "glad."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Deary, it's just the place for you." Olive Stockton was emphatic. "When I heard of it I said, 'That's just the place for Jean.' Jean, you must take it. If you don't I shall never speak to you again." And she would have good reason for not doing so, if it came to that, for a solid commission would have slipped out of Mrs. Stockton's fingers.

"Just the place," Jean mused. "Just like our own place at home, too, my father's place, though our house was much larger, of course. Don't you like it, Beauty?" She turned to Bonds.

"Oh, quite! Quite! Quite!" The English screen star adjusted a monocle and approved of the honest edifice. "Quaint, isn't it? Quite quaint! Oh, quite!"

They stood on the lawn of the old house, looking like a picture some hotel might show in an advertisement to attract the *bourgeoisie*, Jean in a long white corduroy polo coat, belted extravagantly, with enormous pockets, and a white corduroy hat crushed over her red hair. Beneath her skirt, small russet brogues peeped out. All very chic, very exaggerated. A Bleecker Street model would have worn such things to the races. Olive, full-busted, full-hipped, with a girlish manner that betrayed her matronliness, was up to the minute in a foulard frock with an ermine stole about her neck. Bonds was the prize exhibit of the party—very doggy, very "sport." Cap and colored shirt, brown velours coat with breeches, golf stockings of African barbarism. He smoked a short brier pipe—registering virility. The trio might have been photographed for *Vanity Fair*.

They went up an old rose path and stood for an

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

instant looking at the whitewashed walls and dark oak lintels.

"With a good landscape gardener, and a good decorator—such as Fred Feind," Olive Stockton suggested, warily, "you would have the show place of the Sound. My dear, just give Feind a chance, and a picture of the house will be in all the country magazines; you know those papers the people at Newport read." She turned to Bonds. "What do you say?"

"Oh, undoubtedly," the movie actor nodded. They were allies, these two, hunting the same quarry, and it behooved them to join forces occasionally. "A place as simple as this, you see, requires a sort of dramatic change in the interior. You will want some of those nobby Japanese things, inside, what? When I was staying in Surrey with Sir Solomon and Lady Eckstein, they had a most charming, most charming idea of a goldfish-pool in the floor of the sun-room. These decorator Johnnies are expensive, I understand, but they're necessary to give an air—you understand. Absolutely necessary. Oh, absolutely."

"Your husband won't kick about a little expense in fixing you up in your home. He wouldn't do that, would he, deary?" Olive knew little about John Keogh beyond that he was rich, and also that he was, as she forcefully put it, a clam. She despised the man, but she was also a little afraid of him.

"H'm! I'd like to see him object!" Jean drew herself up. "'Tisn't his business to tell me what kind of a home I'm to have. Gee! but we could have some peachy parties here!"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Oh, absolutely! High jinks in the country."

"You can have a room all to yourself, Beauty, to study your parts." She pouted like a baby. "Big Beauty 'll have a big room for his big self to study his big act in. And, oh!" she clapped her hands in glee, "we'll get Britton the aviator out here. We'll show these hick Colonial Dames a little speed!"

They moved toward the porch. Bonds thought Olive had enough of an inning and that something was coming to him.

"You know, Jean, there's one thing you'll need about here to sort of make the place country. Dogs! Oh, rafts of dogs! You must let me help you out on that. You see, I was brought up on that sort of thing, and so forth—"

"I want a Pom', a little chocolate Pom'."

"Listen, dear girl, don't be a silly ass. You want a couple of police dogs and a few Airedales. And a wolf-hound— Oh, by Jove! I know where I can pick up a most gorgeous beast for a mere five hundred dollars. And a white collie—you'd simply adore a white collie! You could get a magnificent collection for a mere six or seven thousand. You'd better leave that to me."

"Isn't he wonderful!" Jean turned to Olive raptly. She laid her hand on Bonds's sleeve. "Listen, Beauty dear, won't you tell what you were at home before you became a motion-picture artist—"

"I can't." Bonds's voice was crisp. "That's not my secret. It belongs to many people. I promised my family I wouldn't say." He looked extremely noble. "I never break my word."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I bet he was an earl or something," Jean said, aloud, to Olive. "But some day you'll tell me, sweetie, won't you?"

"Perhaps. When I have the right—"

"Isn't he wonderful!" Jean said, again.

"What you want also is a good saddle-horse for your own use. Now I'm going to find you one that's 'way-up-in-the-pictures.'" He had overheard that piece of horse-slang at the Jamaica races, and wasn't quite sure what it meant, but it sounded well. "I can get him for a paltry one thousand two hundred." He smiled at her. "You see, I know a lot about horses. I've been practically brought up with them all my life."

I wish John Reynolds, his camera-man, could have heard him then, or McCoy, that notably blasphemous director. They would have split their ribald and sinful sides with glee. . . .

"Listen, Limey," Reynolds used to tell him, "if I wasn't the best camera-faker in the world," which the old sinner was, "even the Brooklyn chauffeurs would laugh at you on a horse." They had just finished taking a five-reeler, "More Than Coronets," in which the young Duke of Poulton-cum-Roxburghe-by-the-Mere came to Kansas to reclaim his younger brother, the remittance-man. And Reynolds had been sorely tried. And so had been McCoy, the director. "The left side, man, the left side!" He was hoarse from bawling. "Haven't I told you a million times you can't get on a horse from the right side? Oh, God damn you for a knock-kneed charwoman!"

"It's so good to have somebody around who

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

understands all about these things, Beauty," Jean breathed gratefully.

"Listen, brother," Olive whispered to him. "Go easy on that stuff. This Keogh guy looks as if he knew a thing or two about dogs and horses. I'm just telling you."

"I should worry," Bonds laughed. "She wouldn't believe him."

II

Since she had married John Keogh life had gone by for Jean in such a rapid, whirling, golden-colored dust-cloud that she had neither time to think nor time to see. In the years before she had married him there had grown up in her a certain steeliness of character, an iron ambition to get what she wanted. It was there for a while after she had married. She wanted money, and the things that money meant. Now she had them. She was going to keep them. The memory of sordid poverty and degradation had made them dramatically worth while—the only thing in the world.

And she had gotten these things very easily. It was no hardship for her to marry Keogh. She loved no one else. It was not in her to love, as that term goes. No tenderness, no vision. She wanted, for herself and for herself alone, material bodily things and pinchbeck luxuries of the mind. The joy of another person in her was nothing to her, except that it flattered her vanity. She had no pleasure in giving. She wanted. In a little time her feelings in the intimacy of John Keogh passed from the frank joy of any young animal to a pleasure such as

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

a good dinner would afford. Later it became an agreeable thing, like nibbling chocolate. Soon there would be boredom. Inevitably, the desire for another. Her husband became nothing more to her than a sort of gold-mine which she in her acumen had discovered and by her cleverness exploited.

There had been at first a delirious feeling of joy in the spending of money. There was a luxury in entering a store and buying such things as pleased her—shoes that laced up the back, a gaudy lavallière, an ornate wrist-watch. There was a sensuous abandonment in patronizing beauty-parlors—least of all the things she needed. There had been a delirium in the possession of her first motor-car. She liked to go to expensive restaurants where the louder cabaret features obtained. In the same room with her there would be a commercial photographer with a foreign title—a man about whom there were the most indiscreet and perverse things said. There would be a Broadway personage whose hobby was the wearing of many emeralds. When he died she mourned him as though he had been an intimate personal friend. "Poor Emerald Jack is dead," she told her masseuse. "It was such a shock. My heart nearly stopped beating when I heard of it. Why, it was only Thursday night we were together at Parson's!" She deliberated whether she would send a wreath, but decided against it. At that time she was afraid of what her husband would think. Later she cared very little. She forwarded a wreath to a dead cardinal whom she had never seen and toward whose faith her upbringing had been passionately inimical.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

In a little time it did not suffice her to be among these people at various restaurants. She wanted to be of them, a personage among personages. She took to handing folded bills to head waiters to secure choice tables, to have the staff of various restaurants hurry at her approach, smiling on the surface and contemptuous beneath it, for the French are a thrifty people and abhor waste. Head waiters discussed her with a freedom that would have made even a public woman savage. But they bowed and shuffled and made great ado over her, and pocketed her lavish tips. Later Olive Stockton remonstrated with her.

"Why do you give those waiters so much?" Olive hated to see money diverted from her own hand.

"I guess friend husband can stand the gaff," Jean would laugh.

She was forever getting rid of John. She abhorred dining with him. He was such a damper on fun. He disliked seeing her drink so many cocktails and stingers. And, moreover, he didn't dance.

"We're not in New River now," she would tell him. "I've got to keep my place in society. I've got my friends. You'd be more at home dining at the Athletic Club than coming out with us. And besides, I promised Olive—"

"I don't like your hanging around with that gang so much," Keogh would object.

"No, you'd rather have me with your sister Derith and the sewing-circle—" There would be an exchange of recrimination and Jean would go out eventually with her friends. Soon, John thought, they would be in the country, and there in the pure

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

air he would get a chance of putting her right. Why quarrel now?

She had by this time made friends here and there. Olive Stockton had caught her, and to Jean the calculating matron was the epitome of society. There were names Olive mentioned high in New York society which thrilled Jean. The men of this circle still had a bowing acquaintance with Olive, but never in the presence of their women-folk. All remembered the tragedy of Peter Stockton, who shot himself when, ruined financially, debauched with drink through keeping up with his wife's gay acquaintances, he had discovered her intrigue with a cheap actor. He was a proud man, young Stockton was. He felt he had been so soiled he could not live. . . .

"I should like to know some of those people," Jean had once suggested.

"There's nothing to it, deary," Olive informed her. "A bunch of prunes. There's as much fun in that gang as there is in an undertakers' convention. They've got no use for me. Do you know why? Because I told them all to go to hell!" She laughed. "They hate me. When I was playing around with von Bergheim, the ambassador, after Peter had drunk himself to death, and ruined us both—" So went her version. "Mrs. Pat Wagstaffe warned him that I was using him for social ends. Me! Bergheim—that man was too damned smart for America!—Bergheim laughed. 'Olive Stockton is too real a person to worry about society!' That's what he said. Society! I've had enough of it!"

Jean was entranced with her. She showed Jean

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

photographs taken here and there abroad. "The Grand-Duke Boris, taken at Venice." Jean thrilled at these august names, counts, grand dukes, ambassadors. To be seen with Olive suggested she was of the same fraternity. And patiently and gratefully she allowed Olive to pilot her to milliners, modistes—to this restaurant, to that. The Stockton woman gave her so much, such a flavor of importance, that she must repay it in some way, and repay it very generously she did, in the only exchange she knew, her husband's money. The car her husband had given her was always at dear Olive's disposal. There were presents of jewelry from Jean's account at Tiffany's. She allowed one of Olive's men friends to paint her portrait for a thousand dollars—an atrocity like a lithograph, hard as a rock. It was displayed on Seventh Avenue, and Jean passed by every day to gloat over it.

From far and near the jackals came at the news of a victim. Jackal to jackal cried, and they circled about her with eager red eyes and slavering mouths. She had been feeling a little poorly of late, undoubtedly the result of late hours, of hectic dancing, and of too many cocktails. There was recommended to her a doctor, a big, sleek man with a jowl like a barkeeper's.

"I'm going to inject a serum into you, a mixture of animal fluids—a new discovery," he decided. "A series of those and you'll be right as rain. You are very run down now, and you just came in time."

That also gave her a thrill, to be attended by a physician whom a great opera star depended on, could not do without, so he said. "And she's every

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

bit as highly strung as you are." He told her, unmindful of his Hippocratic oath, of the nationally known poet whom he had saved from drink. He said indiscreet things of men and women high in public life—but that was probably only his way of gaining patients. He was having dinner with a great actress that evening.

"Won't you dine with us some evening?" Jean smiled at him. "Us" meant Olive Stockton and a few other "jolly people" of that brand.

"I should be delighted to," he smiled gallantly. And leaving her, he wondered how much the traffic would bear, as the business phrase was. "Hum! Keogh Shipyards," he smiled. Here was a patient whom it wouldn't do to allow to think herself well.

Forgotten for a long time now were the days of filthy poverty in the ship-building town. She did not wish to remember them. She had manufactured for herself a vague pedigree of Scottish nobility. In a circle where most pedigrees were as vague as hers, she passed muster. None pinned her to detail. There was a bit of old wisdom about people in glass houses. . . .

Had she remembered, cherished as some bitter secret, evoked with regularity, the old unhappy days in her mother's house—the grinding and very awful poverty, the sordid voyages to the pawnshop, the villainies and occasional indecencies of her mother—it would certainly have made her wary. But she lost that memory, cast it aside. It was very like what religious folk of certain sects call losing faith—to them a great tragedy, the loss of rudder to a ship certain to end up on bars and shoals, bat-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

tered, foundered, wreckage. To Jean money had lost its value. The shiny white coins, the gleaming yellow counters, the crisp green and saffron bills represented nothing to her. They were not cells of energy that must be filled by labor and brains before being unloosed for the generation of power. They were merely formalities in a pleasant ritual by which she got what she wanted. She was unbalanced, intoxicated. There were so many of them. She was like a courtezan of the poorer kind who spends her fees recklessly on gramaphones, on chandeliers, on volumes of the *Encyclopedie Britannica* or what not so long as she spends them; or like those miners one hears about who light ten-cent cigars with hundred-dollar bills when frenzy-struck. They have passed the saturation-point, and life for them has taken on the grotesque proportions of a hashish-eater's dream.

There is a system of defense which the oily Nipponese use, and the name of it is *judo*. Its main principle consists in giving way unsuspectedly to an attacker and, as the attacker loses balance, guiding him, by his own power, to a terrible crashing fall. I see that inordinate grasping rush of Jean's toward the treasure which was Shane Butler Keogh's. I see the cunning old fighter's sudden relaxation. An instant of apparent victory and I see Jean hurtling to her fall. . . .

III

"But, Jean, this is ridiculous." Her husband was worried. "Eight thousand dollars for furnishing one room. This man Feind is a robber—"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

She snuggled close to him. Outside on Madison Avenue the young spring day was glowing like a dryad. And a queer unrest was about the city, the unrest that heralds summer. She was very beautiful that morning; her hair, like the darker kind of gold, gave strange tints in the morning sunlight; her eyes, green like the deeper parts of the ocean, made one unconsciously think of August and the ruffled sea; her neck and shoulders had the life-full, healthy white of a narcissus. Underneath the green-and-gold dressing-gown one sensed her figure, lithe as a mermaid's. She had left her seat at the breakfast-table and come around to him, sitting on the arm of his chair.

"Listen, sweetheart, you may be the greatest discus-thrower in the world, but you know nothing of decoration. Fred Feind is no crook. He's the only straight man in the business." He had told her so himself. "At any rate," she fiddled at his tie, "it's my duty, isn't it, to attend to the house? I know what's what."

"But we can't afford it," he protested. "Even if I do as you say and withdraw my share in the works—"

"You won't have to do that." She had still some sense left. "You can borrow—" and she leaned her cheek against his, "and my big Buddha can make money. Buddha can make money for his Jeanie!"

He was appeased by her cheek, by her purring accents. Had it been a mere question of money to be spent she would not have taken the trouble to "vamp him a little," as she termed it to Olive

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Stockton, using the cheap motion-picture phrase. But it was the matter of a house, of a position in suburban society, of a place to have her friends—Olive, and Vernon Bonds, and Britton the aviator. They had great plans about it—they were going to have a private bar, exactly like the bar at Healy's, but she hadn't said anything to John about that; Feind would arrange it privately. Fred was such a good sport!

"But be sensible, Jean," John still grumbled. Her velvet, electric arm went about his neck. She rubbed his ear gently.

"Your friend Hanrahan is just crazy to help you." She turned his head around to her. "Buddha, please let him, for Jeanie's sake. Don't be a fool. Good Buddha."

Yes, of course Hanrahan would help him. He had met the big broker several times at the Athletic Club, and had golfed with him at Garden City and Scarsdale. The fleshy, pot-bellied man was prouder of having played with John than of the millions he had made in Wall Street. "When I was at lunch with John Keogh, the discus-thrower—" he would say. "Did you ever see young Keogh handle a cleek?" he would ask his fellow-members of the Bankers' Club. "I was playing with him at Oakridge on Friday. I got a stroke a hole from him, and was six down at the turn—"

For the glory of having played with him, for the honor of numbering among his friends the world's champion discus-thrower, Hanrahan was eager to pay. The only currency he knew was his wisdom on the Stock Exchange and his inside knowledge.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Early in May, after the round at Garden City, he approached John.

"I want you to get in on something," he told him.
"There's going to be some fun on stocks."

"But I don't know anything about them," John had answered.

"Leave it to me," Hanrahan grinned. A week later he handed Keogh a check for ten thousand dollars. "I lost a couple of points," he apologized. "I sold you out a bit early, but it's dangerous work." He had put in a thousand for young Keogh in Ohio City Gas and had watched it soar from forty-six to fifty-six. The boy hardly understood. Jean's eyes bulged when he showed it to her.

"I'll turn it over to the Salvation Army, I think."

"Are you crazy?" she all but screamed. "Give it to me. The Salvation Army indeed!" And he gave in.

It was rather hard to retuse Hanrahan when he wanted John to jump in and nip a point in Ajax Rubber, and Keogh became possessor of another ten thousand by some mysterious agency. Jean had been contemptuous when he talked about helping a new political movement inaugurated by the younger men in the New York clubs.

"Of course I'm not clever enough to do any speaking, any writing, or anything like that. But canvassing or something of the kind. I'd like some work."

"But you're working hard enough."

"Working? How?"

"You're playing golf with Hanrahan and his friends and they're giving you the tips for it. You're making money. Isn't that enough?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Good God! Every ounce of sporting blood in him rose to his face. He felt degraded, soiled. Here was the end, he decided.

He had been foolish enough to mention to her a thing of which Hanrahan had spoken. A Tammany Governor had appointed a new Public Service Commissioner. Through some subtle connection it seemed that the price of civic railroad stock was to go skyrocketing

"Beg, borrow, and steal to get all you can in on this, when the moment comes," Hanrahan had told him. "I'll see you're in on it for one of the biggest slices." John had used it as an illustration of the rottenness of politics when speaking to Jean of the new movement in which he hoped to help. Jean's eyes had glinted.

"Isn't it easy to make money when you know how?" she had breathed, fiercely. "God, I wish I was a man!"

When it had been proposed to take his profit out of the operation on the Exchange the first thought that had come to his mind was of his father. How the old merchant despised that manner of commerce! "There may be economic reasons for this traffic," he remembered old Shane saying on one occasion. "But what I want to know is whose money is this, this difference in price of stocks that the outsider profits by? Is it the development of the property? Then whose property is it? Oh yes, there are reasons. Commercial astuteness! Foresight! Risk! By God! it smells to me like thievery!"

It was patent to his son that there was no ethical reason for his getting this money. The money was

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

none of his. What even if he did risk a few thousands! Not by legerdemain did money grow, but by sound, immutable economic laws, based upon sweat of the brow and agony of the brain. And to get it any otherwise was arrogating the labor, physical and mental, of some other person; was, diving beneath all veneer and disguise, in simple terms, common thieving. There was only one way of getting money—by sane labor; all else was wrong. There would be accidents, of course, economic phenomena, of which sleek, cunning men would take advantage, sacrificing some unspotted, inviolate thing within them for a pocketful of counters. In the end all this thing evened up, in mental, spiritual, or physical quality. Such was according to the rhythm of life, the secret way which the Chinese call Tao. . . .

This thing he could not reason out, but he felt it was right. The clean sportsmanship which had come to him from no huckster's loin, but from the greatness of Shane Butler Keogh, from the strain of the Irish dukes of Ormond, and from the glorious Connaught sept which gave kiss for kiss and paid blow with blow, that held him to the truth. He knew it with the instinct of the Irish wolf-hound, which does not hunt rabbits. . . .

But her arm was very soft and very white about him, and her hair was gloriously red, dark red like some dead Venetian lady's, and there were her emerald eyes, and her skin live-white like moonstones. . . . And into her keeping he had delivered up that heart of his, and his soul was bound up in her, and toward her he felt a great responsibility.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Buddha," she pleaded. "Buddha! My Buddha! I want a place in the country for my big Buddha."

A place in the country, yes, he wanted that. Somewhere where trout would rise to a delicately cast fly, and where there were jackpike and bass in a river; where he could stroll along with a pair of wise Sealyhams, on the chance of an otter. He hadn't yet seen this place Jean had chosen. She wanted it to be a surprise to him, she had said.

"And if you don't take this chance," she hovered over him, sensuous as a cat, "somebody else will."

"Well," he wavered, "I'll see."

He held her off at arm's-length. He looked her straight in her green eyes.

"Jean," he asked, half savagely, "do you love me? Tell me truly, do you love me?"

"Do I love you?" she asked him, reproachfully. "Do I love you?" Her mouth fluttered and her eyes grew dim and troubled. "Do I love you?" She leaned forward on him, hardly breathing. "Do I love you?" she whispered. "Ah-h-h-h!"

A very consummate little actress, that girl! I think of her, and I feel like breaking into a torrent of applause. I feel like rising in my seat and cheering wildly. "Do I love you? Ah-h-h-h!" And all the time she had been thinking of the moonlight in the garden by the Sound, and of Bonds there. Bonds who must have been an earl in his own country. He would kiss her gently under one of the apple-trees, as he kissed so nobly Viola Lareine in the picture called "The Viking Breed." Wasn't every one entitled to her kiss or two in the moonlight? Britton the aviator would be out there also, and she knew

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Britton would "get fresh." Her throat expanded a little at the thought of Britton getting fresh. He would be rough, sinister, to the point. She was thrilled. And her mouth fluttered and her eyes grew dim as her husband questioned her. "Do I love you?" she answered. "Ah-h-h-h!" Bravo, Jean! Bravo!

IV

Kenton-Bassett, the young playwright, who knew more about crooks than the Police Department does, studied the interior decorator with his shrewd, grinding air. Ostensibly he had come into Feind's studio to get certain information about Tudor fire-places. Really he was practising his hobby, which was a knowledge of crooks.

"I want to see what these guys have got," he had said to a friend.

His eye wandered about the studio, hovered for a minute on an imitation of Fragonard in oils—"for a bedroom of the more lightsome kind," Feind explained; on chairs of various shapes and undoubtedly beautiful lines; on the model of a full-rigged ship, priced at \$900—Feind had bought it for thirty from an old New Bedford whaling-captain.

Feind, fat, soft, and disgusting as a white slug, sat in his chair and looked calmly intellectual. One could tell him at a glance for the more repulsive kind of German, though he claimed to be Dutch. Fair-haired, blue-eyed, with thick wrists and ankles, with minute drops of perspiration on his fat hands, he had the superior manner of his nation. Of honest tradesman stock, he had married a baroness whose

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

father had been recently ennobled, and he used her title among his clientele with a large measure of success. Kenton-Bassett, slight, monocled, bland, very innocent, was limning the German's appearance, diction, and gestures in his mind with keen professional strokes.

"It is this way, my dear sir," Feind was explaining. "Our *nouveaux riches* devote their lives to material things, to the amassing of money. When that is done they notice the lack of the spiritual quality in their surroundings. There is one great necessity of life which they do not possess—culture. They come to me."

"And you provide culture," Kenton-Bassett murmured. "At so much per cult."

"I beg pardon." Feind was haughty. "They give me *carte blanche* and I go ahead and make their surroundings beautiful. Take a typical case—the case of young Mrs. Keogh, for instance. A very typical American family. The elder Keogh was evidently a rough type, a man of the sea, with no sense of the beautiful, nothing beyond his money-grubbing ambition. The son is a boor and the pattern of the father—has nothing in life except the rougher forms of sport, hammer-throwing and football and such. No sense of civilization at all. The young wife is a charming person, very charming, but a product of American life. No background. But she has an eye for beauty. The impulse toward art, I may put it."

"And you cultivate that?"

"My wife, who was the Baroness Martha von Drecksindel, takes an interest in these affairs, a very

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

cultured woman. She invites Mrs. Keogh to tea and helps direct her taste."

"It is charming of the baroness to help you in your business!"

"But this is not a business, *mon ami.*" Feind was very fond of an occasional French word or phrase. It denoted culture.

"I should say not!" thought Kenton-Bassett, coarsely.

"For instance," Feind pulled forth some papers, "we are doing things like this in her house. Here is a Cape Cod room, for example." The playwright ran over the plans smilingly. A fire set: a few uncomfortable chairs, a clock, a table of strange design, a model of a brigantine on the mantel, a few things he did not recognize. "We are giving Mrs. Keogh something unique here—a sanded floor."

"The more modern ginmills use sawdust," Kenton-Bassett thought. "I suppose this will cost all of a thousand dollars."

"Eight thousand, my dear sir," Feind said, gently. "You cannot buy mellowness and beauty in a ten-cent store. Now this is an adaptation of an English living-room. Note the small windows over the bookcase. They were there already in the room and we decided to use them. Very subtle. And here is a morning room. There is a delightful effect of coolness about this marble-topped iron table—"

But the playwright was then thinking of the Cape Cod room, with its furniture worth not more than two hundred dollars, and costing eight thousand. Culture, seven thousand eight hundred dollars. Feind was explaining.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"You see, this gives a sense of refinement, of mellow age to a family. It redeems them from the atmosphere in which their forebears lived. The material welter in iron-foundries, or shipyards, or merchandizing can be forgotten. And to what better usage could their proprietors' money be spent than in equipping their descendants with a sense of beauty and line? Culture, you may say, is expensive, but culture is beyond price. My wife, the baroness . . ."

Outside for a minute the young playwright looked up and down Fifth Avenue, but he saw nothing, for his mind was back among his outlaw companions of long ago.

"And the Wise-Cracking Kid thought he was a blown-in-the-glass crook when he croaked a guy for a hundred-dollar bill!" Kenton-Bassett pondered. "Hell!" he snorted, contemptuously, "he was a damned amateur!"

v

She had gone to Delmonico's to meet Britton for lunch, looking more beautiful than ever in a slinky black frock in which she could hardly walk, which fitted her as closely as a sheath does a Highlander's dirk, and a black-lace hat which gave to her red hair and green eyes and white skin a strange perversity like the canonicals on the celebrant of a Satanist ritual. Britton had telephoned her that he wanted to see her on important business. She had smiled at this, thinking his important business was to make love to her, but she had gone, after making sure that John would be out of town for the day.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

It would be fun with Britton and she could handle him easily, she thought. She met him in the lobby of the restaurant, looking sleek and self-assertive as an actor. He looked her over appreciatively.

"You're some looker, and some swell little dresser, too, I'll tell the world," he greeted her.

"Was that the important business you wanted to see me about? To tell me that?" She smiled archly at him as they went to a table.

"No, it wasn't," he said to her, bluntly. "It was something else. You'll be wanting to get rid of that husband of yours some of these days."

"Well, you've certainly got your nerve with you!" For an instant she was shocked.

"Forget it!" he commented, abruptly. "Forget it! You don't want to live with a dead one. I know you. You want some one with a bit of jazz."

She was mollified. She looked at him with a bold eye and provoking smile.

"Are you suggesting that I make a bolt with you?"

"Gee! I'd handle you." There was a twist to his mouth that thrilled her. Yes, he would. She felt her heart go pit-a-pat. She wondered, with a delicious shiver, what it felt like to be beaten by a man. "If you want to get rid of that stiff of yours and have a good time on your own, you've got to get a bunch of money. That's what I'm here for to-day—to show you how to do it."

She ordered her favorite luncheon dish—lobster à la Newburg with coffee, to be followed by an ornate ice-cream. She sipped a cocktail.

"Where am I to get this money? Playing the races?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Quit the fooling." Britton was serious. "I'll tell you. The money of the future's in aviation, just like it was in ships once, and then in motor-cars. I'm going to form my own company, to fly from here to Chicago and back, one flight a day. Later I'm going to make routes from here to the Coast, and across to Porto Rico and the West Indies. All it wants is a start and a name. I got the name, haven't I? Well, I'll get them going. Do you know what they'll pay to go to Chicago by air bus when they have to? A thousand bucks. It's a gold-mine for the guy that gets there first."

"Where do I come in?"

"Get your husband to put in a quarter-million. He can do it."

"He can do it, but I don't know if he will."

"Sure he will," Britton leered. "A baby like you ought to be able to set a guy crazy, if you wanted to." He looked meaningfully at her eyes, her lips, her arms, her bosom, and even Jean blushed under his gaze. "Just start something, and then go on strike. You got me! And keep it up. They all fall for it."

"But where do I come in?" she repeated.

"Here's where you come in." Britton leaned across the table. "Get this guy of yours to invest the coin in your name. Make it as if it were your investment. See? Tell him you'd like to have something of your own. See? You don't want any life insurance or any kind of settlement. But tell him you want an interest in life. There's a piece in a paper I've been reading about women having the right to live their own life. I'm going to get you that. It's a great spiel. You just slip him that

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

stuff, and vamp him a bit the way I told you. Jean, you'll be living the life of Reilly in six months."

She went carefully over the proposal, and the thought of it carried her off her feet. To have her own money, to do as she liked. She could then tell John and his sister to go to hell, she thought, with unrestrained bitterness. There were women she had envied, women rich in their own right, who went to Europe when the fancy took them, meeting all kinds of famous personages; who went off on agreeable clandestine trips to Bermuda, or indulged their fancy in romance, without fear of any marital complications, dropping this suitor or lover when his novelty waned. That was the life that suited her, she thought, eagerly. She would be free, comfortable, beautiful, envied. For her there would come an existence of famous hotels and famous watering-places. She would be courted by famous names—the Grand-Duke Paul, for instance. And she would marry some senile nobility for his title, lord or marquis or count he would be, some doddering ancient who would be thirsty for sight of her beauty, whom she would "cheat," as the phrase was, with all the joy of a new game. She would come back specially to New River, countess or lady or marchioness, and, passing by in her limousine, she would survey for a minute through her jeweled lorgnette John Keogh and his sister Derith when she met them—and she would see to it that she did meet them—and would laugh contemptuously and would pass on. And how she would laugh! God! how she would laugh! Her fingers crисped and her eyes dilated at the prospect.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I got a firm of lawyers that'll settle up the whole thing, that'll see you right. We'll fix everything. Now get busy, Jean, because there's a bunch of guys here in this town would put the cash up if they got the chance. They're only crazy to get in on it."

She glanced at him shrewdly. Of her early years there remained only one lesson, acute mistrust.

"Say," she led, "if there's so many people want to put up money, why do you ask me to do it?"

"Because I want you to have the profits."

"But why me?"

"Listen, baby," he leaned forward and eyed her hypnotically. "I'm going to get mine out of it. You're going to come through and come through good." He eyed her meaningfully. She was satisfied.

"Say, how'd you like to come on a little party some night? Something with a bit of life. None of these New York things. I know a place up in Yonkers that's got a little life in it—you can shimmy to your heart's content and nobody will put you off the floor. Hey?"

"I don't know. No, I couldn't." That was a bit too dangerous. John—

"Tell your husband you're going out with Mrs. Stockton and that you'll stay at her place all night. We'll get home about three, and I'll drop you off at her apartment. Hey?"

"I'd be afraid. He might find out! I'd be afraid."

"Ah, come on! . . ."

VI

Because of his good looks, which were wonderful; because of his manner of wearing his clothes, of

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

matching necktie and socks; because of his fulsome courtesy; and because of his fame as a motion-picture star—there were a hundred women in New York who carried the features of Vernon Bonds in their hearts. He was the ideal lover, a bridegroom of whom young girls dreamed. He was a habit that grew on those who knew him. Women thought of him all the time, and all the more because their men-folk laughed at his name and very emphatically expressed a wish to kick him from here to hell and back again. He was becoming very necessary to Jean, for his slack features typified to her masculine beauty. His clothes and manners were utterly impressive; they satisfied that portion of her which thrilled at the worthy books of Mr. George Barr McCutcheon. He was romance in human form. She loved, too, his mysterious origin. There was such an air of the great royal world in his reminiscences.

"I was up salmon-fishing in Scotland with The MacDugald—an old Scottish title, greater than a duke's. . . . When I was hunting with the Lewises —Sir Mendoza Lewis is Master of Foxhounds in Surrey. . . ."

"I wonder what his people are," she once said to John. "Marquises or earls, I bet."

"More probably honest butchers," John was certain. He was very far off—for Bonds's father had been a grave-digger in Hull and his mother a charwoman addicted to gin.

"You American men never give anybody credit," she countered, hotly. "Because a man takes care of his finger-nails and knows how to dress like a gentleman you're always knocking him."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I don't think of him. I think as little about him as I do about a chorus-girl."

"I bet you think about them a lot," Jean thrust back. It never occurred to her that a man could have any interest in life beyond women, and those flashy types, and preferably frail. . . .

She stopped her car at Forty-seventh and Fifth Avenue on her way down-town to keep an appointment for tea with Olive Stockton at the little confectioner's shop on Forty-fourth Street, for she had seen him strolling up the Avenue, a striking figure in blue serge and an exaggerated derby hat, white spats, a colored shirt, wearing very ostentatiously a cotton tie, and carrying a stick such as a plowman might conceivably carry, a knobby, heavy thing for rough roads—a little ostentation of his own. "This tie?" he laughed to his women friends when they were horrified at what they thought was an oversight. "You know the officers of several of the Guards always wear a cotton tie. Very wanky?" At which they were duly impressed.

"Vernon!" she called, imperiously.

He saw her. He doffed his hat. He came to the car loudly. She cut his greetings by a question.

"What do you mean by neglecting me? I haven't seen you since the night before last!"

"Not my fault, I assure you. I told you yesterday I had an appointment with that author fellow to talk about a new scenario."

"How did you make out?"

"He was very rude, very rude indeed. I don't know what the beggars are coming to. I really don't. Told me the sight of me gave him a pain in

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

the— Well, all over, all over, as it were. He was crazy as a loon. All those fellows are, you know. But it was very wearing, very wearing, I assure you."

He looked around, anxious that people should hear him, see him, savor him to the utmost.

"Oh, very wearing," he drawled, "very wearing indeed."

"Why didn't you call up to-day and take me to lunch?"

"Well, tell you the truth, dear girl, there was a luncheon engagement I couldn't get out of—"

"A woman?" Jean's eyes glittered.

"Well, yes, as it were. Fifi Darlington, dear old thing, ran in from Cape May to see me. I could hardly refuse, could I?"

"A woman old enough to be your mother. She's got three chins."

"I know, Jean, but I could hardly refuse when I've enjoyed her hospitality so much—"

"Well, I like that! As if she didn't get more out of it than you did!"

"Besides, there are other things for which I am indebted to her. When a woman has made you presents as a tribute to your art, like this watch, for example—"

"Get in here," Jean told him. "Get in at once."

He obeyed smilingly. "Really, you are so much of a little whirlwind! You remind me a lot of Di Fotheringham—Lady Diana Fotheringham, you know. Dear Di!"

"Don't you tell me anything about your love-affairs—" She put on an air of jealousy. Suddenly

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

she pinched him viciously with the nails of her forefinger and thumb. "So she gave you presents, eh?" She pinched him again. "Because of your art, eh!"

"Jean, you're awfully rough. I do wish—"

The car stopped in front of Tiffany's. She marshaled him in. "I'm going to show my appreciation of your art, too." She motioned to a salesman. "I want to get a birthday present for this gentleman," she explained.

"No, no!" he protested. "I really couldn't, Jean. I really couldn't."

"Oh yes, you can! If you can take it from that fat carcass of a Darlington woman you can take it from Jean."

"Honestly, I'd rather not, Jean," but his tone was not convincing. His phrases were like an oft-repeated formula. "Some other time, dear sweet thing!"

"But I insist!" again in her imperious manner with a little stamp of the foot and a flash of compelling eyes.

"Well, if you insist." He gave way gracefully. "By Jove! isn't that rather a decent thing, that bracelet! You know men wear them on the Continent. Considered quite wanky, quite the thing. Bound to your lady-love, and so forth. I've often thought of wearing one."

"Will you please show us that sapphire and old-silver bracelet. Nobody," she pouted, "is going to make my big Beauty presents while I'm around." She laughed at a witty afterthought that came into her head. "And while John Keogh's money lasts."

CHAPTER XVII

I

THE crowd in the New River Socialist party's hall were jammed like little fishes in a can. There was just a palpable mass of black and gray clothing and faces partially white, partially bronzed. From the mass came a strong odor of masculinity. Their voices raised in song and made the walls quiver as under the impact of a great wind.

“Look round—the Frenchman loves its blaze;
The sturdy German chants in praise;
In Moscow's vaults its hymns are sung;
Chicago swells the surging throng.”

The familiar strain of Connell's “Red Flag” was stirring them up to a sort of wild fanaticism as religious fever is brought on hysterically by fevered hymns at a camp-meeting. Their faces glowed as they swung into the crashing chorus:

“Then raise the scarlet standard high!
Within its shade we'll live or die;
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.”

On the platform at the end of the main hall Trevelyan was seated, Dolan by his side. In a semicircle near them were prominent socialists and agitators

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of the town: Sam Barry, a studious young Jewish lawyer, who had embraced the cause for its idealism; Doctor Jamieson, a sleek young medical man, who probably had his own ends in view. He was whispered to be a heavy secret drinker, and the solid inhabitants of New River would have nothing of his service. There were clumsy workmen there, sincere, very honest, like MacGarry of the Teamsters' Union, and Grau, the Swiss jeweler. And there also came Nellie Potts, the suffrage worker, who had been in jail for picketing the White House, a thin, anemic woman of no brains.

The sleek young doctor rose to make an announcement. Trevelyan got up and, waving him aside, walked to the edge of the platform. The audience hummed with interest.

"The Delegate," ran the murmur through the workers' ranks, though delegate from what they did not know. But "The Delegate" they called him, and that was good enough for them. "The Hunts Point Bum!" the I. W. W. men grinned. "Now for something."

He stood looking over the audience calmly, his hands in his coat pockets. He addressed them by no title, neither "comrades" nor "citizens" nor "fellow-workers." He plunged immediately into his discourse in calm, every-day accents.

"Our next step in the labor program," he began, casually—"our next and chiefest step is to secure a measure of control over the industries you work in." He might have been a professor addressing a circle of students. "You have got a measure of control already. You got it first by demanding safety and

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

workshop conditions. You got more control when you demanded a minimum wage and sanitation. You got more and more when, as in the case of the Keogh Shipyards, you demanded the dropping of scientific management and the installing of the six-hour day. That is clear, is it not?"

There was a silence through the hall—a silence of attention and consent. Trevelyan went on, calmly:

"This control will advance until the workers share the process within the shops and in the control of industry as a whole, until the iniquity of capitalism dies, until the state owns and the workers manage. That is clear. That is right. That," his voice rose triumphantly, "is sure."

They were still silent in the hall, a little abashed at the prospect. It seemed too much. It was like a golden age—like the heaven the Salvation Army converts believed in, a plane of porphyry and jasper, which they dream of in religious ecstasy, and know truly cannot exist when the delirium passes.

"I could bring before you to-day spectacled, thinking men from schools, who would tell you these things are true, and you would listen and shake your head, saying, 'What does he know of life who spends his time in class-rooms?' And you would look at the figure he had made for you. 'It is very pretty!' you would say.

"Behold, now I show you a miracle!" His voice took on the ringing, hypnotic note, and the audience tensed itself. "I shall breathe life into this figure and it shall walk among you, human, sentient, an evidence for your eyes. I call to your mind to-day—" his finger shot out—"the forgotten centuries when

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

you were serfs and helots to the overlords of England, of Normandy, of Germany High and Low. When you were servants to their servants, a jest to their buffoons, with the overlords' right of barbarous things upon you. I call to your mind when but a little while ago you were penned in sweatshops, working until the dark hours for a pittance, without air, without comfort. You were property, as kine are, as a horse is—to be worked to death, to be cast aside. How long ago is that? Is it a full generation? No! Not one!

"And to-day where are you? You have your eight-hour laws, your insurance acts, your privileges. Bread in your mouths. Comfort for your children. So far have you come, unbelieving, dark as blind men are. By God!" he snorted, suddenly, "so much farther shall you go."

They were infected now with his swinging periods. Light gleamed in their eyes. There was a rumble of agreement among them more satisfactory than outspoken applause.

"I said before that the state would ultimately own things and the workers direct them. What is this state as it is supposed to be? What is a state but the citizens of it, you and I, and your wives and children? What is the state now? A debauched thing, a machinery arrogated by men who want to own you as they would horses and dogs. Who would flog you to work as a horse is flogged. When you turn and growl they would call out their constabulary and have you shot as a dog is shot. I see them now, sleek, self-satisfied. And some have a lust for power because it makes them feel as gods must

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

feel. And some have a passion for money, gathering it miser-wise, reveling in the red and white of it. They are not so very happy, these men. Their daughters are married for money and are treated often as cadets treat women of the street. And their sons go wrong. In the evening of their lives they sit at home, brooding, broken-hearted. I have in mind one now."

They listened to him so attentively as to hold in their breaths.

"He is a very old man and very rich. The three-score and ten years the prophet allotted to man are by for him these many days, and not Solomon, to whom in one year came gold six hundred threescore and six talents, besides that he had of the merchantmen and of the traffic of the other merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country—not Solomon was as rich as he. And he goes around plaintively with a wizened, pathetic face, eternally asking something of you as he looks at you."

The workers could not place the man. Their eyes were focused on Trevelyan, terribly patient. The speaker's voice had dropped to a musical narrative and his eyes were half closed dreamily.

"And every Sunday he goes to church, in sober black, and listens attentively to the sermon, his hand to his wrinkled ear. And in a quavering, piteous, senile voice he sings a hymn:

"Jesus, lover of my soul,
 Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
 While the tempest still is high!

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Hide me, O my Saviour, hide
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide.
Oh, receive my soul at last!"

He shook his head, still dreaming. He raised his eyes to his audience.

"He is trying," Trevelyan said, simply, "to forget the dead on the Kansas hills."

There was a bellow of rage, a violent cacophony of passion that shook the frail walls of the house, seeming to rack it to its foundations. Hatred black and terrible seemed to rise like a mephitic exhalation. Here and there through the clamor rose a howl like a hunting wolf's. And here and there the snarl of a savage dog. And all through it was a thunder like the sea's, eternal, relentless, certain to conquer.

Trevelyan raised his hand.

"No!" he snapped like a whip. "No!" The savagery died in midair.

"There will be one gray morning," he said, "with the fog upon the hills, and the rain dripping from the larch-trees, when this poor, piteous, and shivering ghost will pass through the inevitable door, and all about him suddenly will be the gray, vengeful spirits of the men dead on the Kansas hills, of their gaunt, dead women-folk and starved children. What will avail him then, his riches, greater than Solomon's? His mercenaries, like a king's guard. Before those gray, terrible avengers there is naught can protect him, a naked and shivering thing! He will call upon his feudal Lord, Jesus, to save him, to take him, his servant, under the shadow of His awful,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

majestic wings"—he laughed terribly—"forgetting in his folly that his King Jesus was just as one of these, a laborer, a worker, a journeyman carpenter of Nazareth in Galilee! Oh, citizens, do not shout in anger, but smile and wait! Smile and wait! Smile and wait for certainty!"

He stopped for a long pause, while the audience looked at him aghast. The picture he had conjured to their minds held them in a dreadful fear, as would the pictures Gustave Doré drew for Dante's Visit to Hell.

"But this does not help you," he went on, "neither the exact vengeance of the dead people nor the accurately balanced scales of fate. These men must go. To you and your children for ever and ever must the profits of your work be. Not to the bloated master or the cunning middleman shall it go—to sleek ones who thrive as parasites on your bowed bodies, on your grimed hands. For you are as a dead body, with them as the maggots of corruption on you. And I say to you, as One said to Jairus's daughter, who was dead, Arise."

His voice crashed like thunder. His hand was outstretched. His features were drawn with concentration.

"Now is the hour when they skulk in their offices with fear, while their women-folk dance as did the women of dead Pompeii while Vesuvius seethed above their heads. Go to them, you who are strong and they weak. Go to them and demand to see their books that ye shall have your fair share of the profits of your wet brows and gnarled hands, and

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

that fair share is nigh unto all. There must be no more secrecy about their ledgers and journals, their accounts owed and payable, their profits and loss. Yours is the work and yours is the right to know what they are doing with your work, the offspring of your brain and hands. Go to them as the workers went unto Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, making their just demands, and if their hearts harden against you, as did the heart of Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, then we have plagues we can visit upon them, greater than the plague of frogs and the plague of serpents and the plague of the river red with blood—”

He advanced to the edge of the platform. He leaned over.

“All the cattle of Egypt died,” he quoted. There was a roar of understanding and applause from the I. W. W. men in the hall. It spread to others. It rose to a growl of threatening anger. Trevelyan pointed to the red flag draped above the platform.

“And in this sign you shall conquer,” his voice rose like a bugle call; “under this standard which typifies blood of men, the red blood that flows through the veins of the worker with mallet and chisel, the blood which was drunk by Moscow’s thirsty stones, which was shed by rifles on the Kansas hills, which was spent in dungeons for your progress. Red blood of yours warring with black blood of your enemies; the white blood of cunning, mercenary profiteers; the thin, bluish blood of hereditary interest. Red blood that spells fraternity, that spells equality, that spells revolution, if dammed in its rushing, relentless tide!”

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

II

She was a trifle unsettled, Derith Keogh was, sitting in her office that June morning. Strange little creases were in her white brow and her mouth was set at the corners. About her to-day, as there was about her room, was a sense of incongruity as though she should not be there. She had come into the plant in a hurry that morning, for Angus had wished to speak to her, direct from a canter on the fast little cob she rode, the Princess Royal, the short-backed, close-coupled mare which had won two ribbons at Madison Square Garden. And she had not taken the time to change. She was still in her riding-breeches, flary as a French officer's, her shining boots, coat, and stock. On her head her bowler hat struggled hard to keep her massive hair in bounds. She was more like some fashionable artist's ideal of a horsewoman than the type itself. And yet there were few men she could not outride, and no woman had a lighter hand on a rein. It was strange to see her there, her brow full of thought, anxious. She was more like an actress in a setting, mumming some fictional embarrassment. And yet her troubles were very real.

Angus came through the door. His gray eyes were studying her intently. She did not wait for him to say about what he wished to see her, but plunged into her thoughts abruptly.

"You know, Angus, I don't half like this man Trevelyan's speech, as I heard about it. I don't like it at all."

He said nothing, still watching her.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"In a measure, of course, the man's right, in an academic way, always supposing that employers do batten on labor. But I don't like the way he puts it; and that incitement to sabotage, that's wrong, all wrong."

He was still silent. She looked at him.

"I beg your pardon, Angus," she apologized, prettily. "I'm sorry. There was something you wanted to tell me."

"Yes," he said, briskly. "I wanted to tell you I'm going away."

"A holiday? Off fishing?"

"No. Not a holiday. Not off fishing. Away for good."

"I don't understand you," she puzzled. "You mean you are going to leave the yards? Not be manager any more?"

"Exactly."

She was silent for a minute. She turned to him with a wide gesture of frankness and apology.

"Have I said or done anything to hurt you, Angus?" she asked. "If I have, believe me, I'm so sorry. Please don't let it count."

"No," he went on, mechanically. "Nothing."

"Then why?"

"What is the usual reason?"

"Oh!" she gasped a little. "Oh, I didn't understand. Why didn't you say something? Why didn't you raise your salary yourself if you wanted it?" Into her voice there had crept a certain frigidity. This wasn't her Angus. He might have been right. But somehow it hurt, it offended. He was like a new person to her.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Also I thought I'd like a new field. It offers a chance for expansion."

"So you are going off to some competitor, Angus." She looked him straight in the eye. "I didn't think that of you, Angus Campbell, nor did my father think that of you when," she added, with bitterness that was unlike her—"when he raised you as he would have his own son and gave you everything that John or I had." Her face had become white with a sort of disillusion and for a time there was tense silence in the room. "I am glad," she went on, "that my father is dead, Angus; that he did not live to see this day."

He flushed scarlet before her accusing eyes. For a man to have said that would have meant that man's death, but she was a woman and he could say nothing. She was dearest in the world to him, and the accents of her voice were like vitriol on his heart. He was doing this thing for her own good— withdrawing that the more rapidly she would understand and resent what was being done against her. For an instant he nearly jettisoned his plan and answered her in angry, flaming words. He gripped himself instantaneously and went on with the part he had created for himself and rehearsed in pain.

"Well," he laughed, "a man has got to look out for himself in this world. It is just a business proposition. You've got to see what percentage you're getting on your value. I see a chance of marketing what I've got in a wider sphere. I'd be a fool if I didn't take it. You've got to take what comes your way."

She merely continued looking at him, and to his

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

mind somehow she had become a strange, contemptuous, pitying spirit, all clothes laid aside, body even forgotten, until she was, it seemed to him, two violet-gray eyes in a darkness, examining his alleged individuality with a sense of shock.

"Of course," he told her, "I'll stay around until everything's in shape, until you can control everything yourself."

"I can do very nicely at this moment, thank you," she told him, calmly. And then, in an instant, calmly, too, "I should prefer you to go right away now." And then, "I should like never to see your face again."

"Oh, if that's the way you take it," he said, with a manner of swagger, "there's nothing more to be said." He turned and marched out of the room. On the other side of the door he paused and wiped imperceptible moisture from his forehead. "Good God!" he breathed slowly, and for a moment was about to turn back. "I think that will do the trick," he told himself. "A month; two months."

Behind him she remained dazed. As yet she could hardly understand what had happened, only that there was a great sense of horror and vicarious shame in her veins. Angus, to have spoken like that. "A man must look out for himself"; "one's percentage"; "got to take what comes your way"—why, it was unbelievable! It was like a man of supposed integrity caught cheating a widow, or a clergyman of noted chastity arrested for indecent exhibitionism. Horrible! Horrible! Unbelievable! And yet indubitably true.

She had seen what money did to men before, or

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

the prospect of it. In a fine, adventurous way it had sent the Argonauts to capture a Fleece of Gold. It had made the 'Forty-niners pass through gray and terrible deserts for California gold and set roaring battalions on the Klondike trail. But they were men, those! Hardy sons taking what Mother Nature freely gave them. But there were others—there was the woman who was debauching her brother John for the Keogh treasure. There had been the crowd of yellow, obscene beasts who had tried to loot Myra Hendricks, her aunt, by gripping her spiritual veins with their leechlike mouths. "I am sorry I cannot commit you to prison," the judge had addressed the Asiatic horde. "But if any man had shot you, I would have let him go scot-free, for all you were doing was stealing the Hendricks fortune, and there was as much right to kill you as there would have been to kill a burglar, using the night for cover when you used religious hypnosis, and stealing with jimmy and dark-lantern where you attempted to steal by veiled ritual and insidious doctrine. I am glad to find a plaintiff like Miss Keogh in my court who has no illusions about fakirs and money."

And yet in spite of that experience, in spite of the lesson driven home by the worldly jurist, she had clung to illusions, clung to a splendid belief in human nature. She thought that men saw too clearly what this folly of gold was and, turning aside from it, were content with the profits of their head and hands. They were not all like the three who had come to her, advising her to follow them, like Ross and Braithwaite and Harriman, to an ideal of comfort

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

and monetary power which was naught but the Jewish heresy of the Gilded Calf.

All these thoughts, perceptions, fancies, whirled through her head in a veritable hurricane of passion, some just, some unjust, unrelated sometimes, and very bitterly she condemned Angus Campbell.

“A man has got to take what he gets.”

And he had taken all Shane Butler Keogh had given him—life, education, training, feasting like a shameless guest on what he had no intention of repaying even in gratitude. So passed one phase. And now he was entering the other, going to a place where he could market himself and the things he had gained here, and he would end up as sleek as Harriman, ruthless as Braithwaite, unbending as Ross.

“I should never have thought it. Never! Never!”

The anger passed from her, and, putting her head on her hands, she cried for a long while, for she saw in her mind’s eye the picture of Angus marrying a woman who would advance him in his career, and, being intimate with her and having children by her, in a comfortable domesticity she would never know. She knew she ought to be contemptuous about this, but somehow it hurt her terribly—that one picture, apart even from what he had said, what he had shown himself to be. It was a long time before she straightened herself up, touching her eyes with her handkerchief, and laughing in a hysterical reflex of emotion that was not a laugh, but a hurtful thing to any one who might have heard the pity of it.

“Let him go!” she told herself. “Let him go!”

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

There were still people in the world for her; and for an instant she forgot certain things, looks, laxities. She was worried about the yard and her first enthusiasm came back to her—there were still her workmen! They were true!

III

The news that Angus Campbell had left the Keogh shipyards went through New England's industrial centers in the nature of a shock. He had never been a spectacular figure while there, but, once gone, people appreciated his worth as one notes the importance of an integral unit or bolt in a machine when it is missing. He had said no good-by to the men. He was just there one day, gone the next.

"I guess he couldn't stand Miss Keogh's theories any longer," thought Harriman, the silk manufacturer. "A very wonderful young woman," he nodded, "very beautiful, very *chic*, but not at all the person to run the shipyards. She'll miss him."

There were others who looked at the occurrence with more sophistication.

"He's had the run of the place since old Keogh died, and long before it. He must have made a pretty penny on the side. He's Scotch, you know, by both parents. He'll be starting on his own some of these days."

There was many and many a spinster in the town, old-young women with romance in their shriveling bosoms, who looked for a more occult motive. "He's proposed marriage to her," they said, dreaming of their one ambition, "and she has refused him. And

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

now he is going off, eating his heart away." And they shook their pathetic heads, wondering why some women were so prodigal of the gift God sent them. "A time will come," said they, wisely, "when every night she will cry."

At the shipyards the elder workers shook their heads. "He was a man!" They regretted him. A hard taskmaster, but a firm one, and beneath his firm eye and iron jaw there was a heart for distress. "Old Shane would never have let him go. What could have happened?" They shrugged their shoulders. "You can't tell. Well, he's gone." But others grinned evilly, as Dolan's crowd did, and licked their lips.

"Campbell's thrown up his job," Dolan told the Hunts Point Bum.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. One of our men overheard everything while in the corridor."

"I'm sorry," Trevelyan mused, to Dolan's amazement. "I didn't think that of Campbell. He looked to me a fighter, that man did! I suppose he's gone over to some safe and sane place like Harriman's. The yellow pup! I'm sorry."

But he had gone over to no safe and sane proposition. He packed many things, including his flute, and wandered down New England toward New York, calling here and there on old shipmates and seeing objects of interest under the tutelage of guides, as sailors will. He did Plymouth Rock and the Indians at Gay Head, and the Balanced Rock in the Berkshire Hills, and other harmless things. At night he sat on the verandas of hotels, and was eyed coyly

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

by New York maidens of mature years and measured appraisingly by their mothers. And when it became embarrassing he retired to his room, to make the night hideous with his flute.

And in due time he came to New York, where in the Knickerbocker bar he ran into Al Norton, who was passing the time genially discussing an old-fashioned whisky cocktail and the poetry of Harry Kemp. Norton rose from the snug and approached Campbell with an inimical flicker in his left eye.

"What's this I hear about you leaving Derry Keogh flat?"

"You heard that, Al, and you'll hear it again, and I'll trouble you not to contradict it, but it's wrong."

"It's wrong, all right," Norton's sophisticated, clairvoyant eye studied Campbell for a moment. "I'll say it is," he concurred heartily with himself. "What 'll it be?" He rapped on the bar to call attention to his needs. "Here, Ike. A little action! A little action!"

IV

She studied calmly the workmen's delegation in front of her—McKinstry, the fitter, sandy-haired, with the ragged mustache and the green, hating eye; Zukor, of the office force, a young Jew with the beady eye of a snake, and utter cynicism and suspicion and greed indelible in his nose and eyes and mouth; McCann, short, squat, black-avised, a peasant type, always in revolt. Derith was very much at ease, very beautiful that morning, for all her simple tailored skirt and tailored blouse. And on her face was a smile that was very winning—tremendously

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

wise. She had changed not a little in the few days since Angus had gone. She had lost something that day, a sense of trust, and now, while she was not yet suspicious of every one, still she wished to be sure of their motives and she was summoning up her age-old woman's inheritance of blandishment and smile to get to the bottom of these men's motives.

"But why do you want to see these accounts? What exactly is the idea beneath it all?"

"Because it is the right of the workman," McKinstry said, boldly, "to know about the disposition of his work."

"He doesn't mean that exactly, Miss Keogh," Zukor broke in, with a verminous grimace which he intended to be an ingratiating smile. "I tell you, it is good for us all to know where we are. It helps."

"You think"—Derith dazzled him with a smile—"you think it makes for efficiency."

"Oh, absolutely," went the little Jew's sing-song.

"How?" Derith shot the word from her mouth like a bullet.

"Well— Oh, well—" Zukor was stumped.
"Well—"

"The thing is," McCann broke in, "we want to see them books!" McCann had no patience with diplomacy. He had hoboed for a while, and trailed with the blanket-stiffs of the Northwest, and had become a light among the minor men of the I. W. W. He had seen Derith give way on many questions. Shove her to it and she would give way on this.

"Let's settle this amicably," she told McCann.
"Is it that you don't trust me?"

"We trust no capitalist," McKinstry said, abruptly,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

and Derith lowered her head so that they shouldn't see the sudden flash in her eyes. When she raised them again there was a dangerous frankness in them.

"Now, McKinstry," she appealed, "let's be quite frank about this. I've granted every request, practically every one, you've made. You've got splendid wages, a six-hour day. Scientific management has been abolished. Aren't you satisfied? Or do you want more? Be frank with me!"

"I'll be frank. We want more."

"Now again, McKinstry. You see I'm all alone here. Mr. Campbell has gone. There is nothing to guide me. I'm just a woman thrown by force of circumstances into running these works. The only way for me to succeed is by getting along amicably with the workmen. What are you entitled to, just as a principle without direct application?" She smiled again. "Be frank with me as I'm frank with you."

"Frankly," McKinstry answered her smile, "we're entitled to all we can get."

"Oh!" she said, calmly and very coldly. And "Oh!" again. For a while there was a silence, they looking at her. She tapped with a silver paper-cutter on the Florentine table. Then she spoke.

"And if I were to refuse point-blank?"

"The day is past when an employer can refuse point-blank," McKinstry dictated. "If you refuse the workers their just demands, you must stand by the consequences."

"If you want to start something, ma'am," McCann grinned evilly, "you'll find a crowd as'll finish it for you. There's a bunch of wobblies in the yard

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

that 'll put the place on the bum quicker 'n lightning'. Just try."

She appealed mutely to Zukor.

"Well," said the little Jew, with long-drawn intonation and a shrug that was a threatening eloquence in itself. And there was silence.

"Well, Miss Keogh," McKinstry snapped, as the one in authority, "what are you going to do?"

She reached for the telephone. "Tell Mr. Pearson to come here," she said into it. Then there was waiting.

Pearson, forty-five, graying, dapper, dressed like a figure in a *Saturday Evening Post* advertisement, four-in-hand, pressed suit, shining shoes, appeared. He was the head of the estimate bureau, an able man of the young executive school.

"Mr. Pearson," Derith told him, "from now on you are manager of these works, and all men are to take their orders from you."

Pearson was silent. He had never seen Miss Keogh so crisp, so hard, as it were, so certain of herself.

"And the program of the yards, wages, hours, and labor conditions are to go back immediately to the state in which they were two years ago. And this program is to be adhered to stringently in the minutest thing."

She rose, her eyes blazing, her finger pointed to the open door.

"And you men," she announced to the delegation, "will get back to work instantly or get out of my yards." And the three slunk out of the door, mouthing silent, terrible words.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALTHOUGH she did not understand it, and for-
A got it for the moment, her father's garden had
always played a strange, symbolistic part in her life,
and to-night, with June in blossom, she moved into
it as she had moved nearly two years ago when the
springtime called her in clear, pagan accents. But
springtime was not calling her now, but the early
maturity of summer, fragrant, passionate, disturb-
ing. Overhead the moon hung low, white, all but
full, and it cut the garden into a pattern of light and
shade, through which dryads and fairies might have
danced their now mincing, now turbulent measures,
ending in a fierce whirl beneath the quivering trees.
The figurehead of Artemis in the moonlight took on
pagan form and was metamorphosed from a thing
of wood and paint into a pagan divinity acquaint
with pagan rites. All that was mystical and clean
had gone from the garden. The violets were no
more, or the virginal dogwood. There were now only
roses, perfumed, blowing, offering themselves like
mature women. The peonies were bursting greedily.
The bees, the wise watchmen of the place, were
sleeping in their cells, and not a bird was heard.

She had been restless in her drawing-room, picking
up a book here, laying it down for another. *The
Undying Fire* she put away, and took up M. France's

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Lys Rouge, a book that to-night burned through ink and paper to her silken skin. Restlessly she moved to the piano and strummed a negro spiritual, and suddenly throwing that aside, her fingers swung into the luscious arias of "Samson et Dalila," and troubled she rose and troubled went into the moonlit garden.

There occurred to her a queer spiritual phenomenon by which she seemed to be standing outside of herself, looking at her own circumstance and personality, and she could see herself, like that chatelaine of Shalott whom Tennyson wrote of, an imprisoned lady, imprisoned by her own work, weaving a web—much as she, Derith, was following a set pattern of her father's in his plan. And she was looking on the world, as she of Shalott did, who now saw a troop of merry damsels, now an abbot on his pad, and now the knights who came riding two and two.

She thought with a sense of shock of what she would be soon were she to continue in that course. There was a friend of hers—an acquaintance it would be more proper, if less kindly, to say—a woman of the Adamses, who sprang to her mind as she stood there—a woman with October in her hair, with harsh lines about her mouth and a rigid head. She could see her now, very much of a lady, in her sitting-room with the mellow, glistening furniture; chaste, prim curtains; subdued light filtering in through a bay-window, and a caged bird which rarely sang. And yet once Hester Adams must have had white, dimpled knees and breasts like apples, and in her veins occasionally, as occasionally in the veins of Derith, fire had run instead of blood. . . . And yet

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

here she was now, with her lace and subdued jewelry and silent bird in its cage.

She had come to the sun-dial and, laying her arms on it, she lowered her head and a moan came from her lips.

"Oh! oh!" she cried. "I want! I want! I want!"

She saw life passing by, not as the Lady of Shalott saw it, maidens such as pre-Raphaelite artists would draw, smug abbots on smug asses, knights who had never a prototype in human affairs, all Victorian conventions ticked out in medieval finery—but as a flame, somehow, now white-hot, now comfortably red, now beautiful with strange greens and yellows, now *macabre* in shimmering, unhealthy purple. But she wanted it!

Across the waters, from a power-boat lying at anchor, there came a strumming on that little Hawaiian guitar called the ukulele and a man's barytone broke out—a college boy, perhaps, or some local bank clerk who was enjoying the night in company of some belle of the town:

"I'm a jazz baby, jazz baby!
I want to be jazzing all the time.
There's something in the tone of a saxaphone]
That makes me do a little wiggle all my own;
'Cause I'm a jazz baby, full of jazz-bo harmony.
That 'walk the dog' and 'ball the jack' that caused all the talk
Is just a copy of the way I naturally walk;
'Cause I'm a jazz baby."

"Little jazz baby, that's me!" A woman's voice broke in, laughing with a liquid *roucoulement*. Derith stood up, electrified.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

That was what she wanted—a little pleasantness, a little vulgarity. She was tired of living on the heights of achievement and problems and white ideals. She wanted to descend to the valley where the common people were, dancing, singing, passing the time pleasantly. She wanted the material joyfulness. A husband and a home, not armed virginity and a lonely house. She would go down to New York or wherever she decided and mix with the men and women of her time and fulfil her destiny as a woman.

"And get all that's coming to me," she smiled, remembering Angus's phrase.

She was electrified into rigidity. Yes, she said she would get it all. She would enjoy the dances in men's arms, the pleasant flirtations, the pomp of splendid marriage. For in the garden there was some hypnotic spirit moving, that whispered to her that in gardens such as this women were hearing moving tales of love, with the world of problems laid aside; that in gardens such as this were merry parties; that in gardens such as this, far abroad, women were walking, wearing coronets, American women such as she was, with wealth and beauty no whit more than hers.

"It's not disloyal, sir," she said, as though she were addressing a ghost.

She had done her best, she said. She had thought and striven and toiled, thinking the mainspring of life was to serve and give, whereas she had known it to be use and take. Had she not seen it in Angus, whom her father had considered the most just and upright of men? Had she not seen it in the workers in the yards?

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"You were wrong, poor gentleman!" she said.
"You were happy; you did not know."

Resolutely she put that aside, firm in her decision. If such was the formula of life, then she would use that formula. The trees about her shook a disturbing perfume, and the roses swayed, and the peonies regarded her with hot eyes. The ground beneath her feet was greedy, and nothing in the garden was beautiful beyond the wise, laboring, tired, sleeping bees.

The moon flowed over the sun-dial and showed up the inscription, *Eheu, fugaces anni.* Alas! the flying years! And it had no longer the pathos of life in its short, haunting melody, but a strange, leering quality, a message of riotous opportunism. From the river came the strumming of the little instrument called a ukulele, rippling words, and a woman's excited, gurgling laugh. Derith danced a few steps.

"Jada! Jada!" she sang. "Poor gentleman, you were very wrong."

CHAPTER XIX

I

AT various times there would come to Jean Keogh an hour of clairvoyance during which the state she lived in seemed impermanent because it was nohow right. In that hour some merciless God stripped illusions from her and showed her herself stark naked, unfitting in the scale of things, and into her eyes would creep a hardness, and that would blaze into a certain anger.

"Oh, hell! What's the use?" She would laugh with easy New York philosophy and then she would have a cocktail.

It was very natural, from her opinion and upbringing, that in these moods she should be suspicious and distrustful of her friends, for she had not the ethics of gentlefolk, who know that each of their circle will act according to a high code, or failing that, will lose caste. Why should Olive Stockton love her? Olive, who had been intimate with patroon families and grand dukes and gentlemen who smiled when they lost, and killed other gentlemen for an affront, ignoring a commoner's insult as beneath them! Why should Olive love her? Or Beauty Bonds, who was of noble family, as she thought, of achievement, of polish? It was because they considered her to be

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of their rank, she decided. And if they found out she was not—

To every one is the inheritance of Father Adam, which he had of the fruit of the tree, the knowledge of good and evil, and into the mind of every one at times the knowledge hammers with certain, unmistakable strokes. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” At times she knew that she had metamorphosed her sane destiny into an unhealthy, unstable thing, tempting and beautiful and dangerous as a quagmire. For all her beauty, she should have married some young artisan and fulfilled herself in keeping his home and cooking his meals and raising his children. In that sphere she could see herself fitting, could see herself grow older year by year—a definite progress. In this one, when she was clairvoyant, she could not see herself at all, from one week to the other, except as in a shadow-play, unreal. In the other life she would have had her trials, her povertyes, her sordidness. She would have had her pleasures, too, moving-picture shows, gossiping scandal, a little debauchery, but all fitting to her personality and station—all consciously right, which was the real test.

There was nothing real to this life, to this continual spending. She was acting a part, and at times it tired her, as some mumming master will weary of living the atmosphere of the Prince of Denmark and Richards the Second and Third, and wish honestly he were back tending his father's plumbing-store. But Jean did not wish she were back a petty dressmaker in a New England town, or wiving the jitney-man. She ought to be. That was natural to

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

her. This she knew, but she did not want it to be so.

All these feelings, impulses, actions, and reactions are puzzling, but perfectly natural. That complex, carnal, selfish thing called Jean Keogh is as clear to me as clear water, as evident as the pen between my fingers, the white paper underneath my hand. Consciously bad, the inherent subconscious self in her told her she was wrong, and because that strange self appearing at times recks nothing of the things of the body, of delicacies to be eaten, or gay garments to be worn, or soft nights to be spent amorously, but sets out with terrible hypnotic clearness the difference between right and wrong, it thrust itself in these hours on Jean Keogh, as on every one, good or bad. She was debauched with money as a morphine addict with his drug, and there was nothing for her but to go ahead using it in increasing quantities. Something was wrong, though, and she must visit anger and dislike on a cause, and as it was from John Keogh, her husband, the money came, on John Keogh her anger was focused.

"God! How I hate that man!" She would bite her lips in anger, but she was too shrewd, too greedy, to do other than play her part of a loving, though flighty little wife.

And so, examining him in her anger as a cat might examine a mouse it has cornered, she came to find his true qualities, and these she hated the more because she had never had them herself. She hated him for his clean sportsmanship. She hated him for his sincerity. She hated him for his sense of what may be done and what may not. And

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

she hated him because, hating him, he did not see it.

"I'll get even with you some day," she told herself, addressing him silently. For what? For having given her his heart, his love, his fortune?

Often as she lay beside him she would have liked to have smashed him physically, to have driven pincers into his flesh, to have seen those clean, unsullied muscles torn apart in red strips. And her impotence to hurt him made her frenzied. She dreamed savagely of giving herself to the first-comer on the street, utterly abandoned, perfumed, in a rage of carnal vengeance, and the meaner the first-comer the better, so that the more she might hurt John Keogh, and dishonor his name, and make him a laughing-stock for hall-boys and night-hawk chauffeurs. Oho! she promised herself, she could deceive him—but she wasn't such a damned little fool. She knew a thing or two. She'd play the big boob for a sucker and muck him up to the two eyes.

"You'll get it good," she promised him.

It is a lonesome thing to be evil, and become unhappy, unless there is a partner or a set to travel with. Invariably the partner and the set arrive. A strange telepathy exists between the abandoned. They respond to one another as the tuning-fork to the struck note.

"There's Britton, for example," Jean smiled.

Britton, slum-bred, evil, suspicious as herself, was her destined companion, destined as certain as that winter follows autumn or as that the moon rises with the setting of the sun. With him there would be great relief, for there would be no need to keep up

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

pretenses. He knew her personality, her mind, as she herself knew it to be, and it thrilled her to know he did. She seemed already to have given herself in a sort of way to him, and was satisfactorily bound to him as though he had known her in the flesh. The facts to which she was accustomed almost to boredom now, namely, dress, magnificent jewelry, soft, clinging undergarments, would renew their first fierce thrill in his company. She would have the same pleasure in making an exhibit of them to him as she would were she to show them to the poor company of her early youth. He was rarely out of her thoughts now, for she saw him as truly as he saw her. She knew he was bad, hard, bitter, dominant. He was one she could not fool, she said, proudly; he would swing on her from the heel if she went too far, just as a matter of course. And the desiring, sophisticated, certain gleam in his eyes stabbed her in the bosom.

"You're a bad egg, Britton," she murmured, in affectionate admiration.

II

He had thought that, once in the country, he and his wife Jean would have been happy; that the hectic atmosphere of New York would leave them and they would settle down to a sane existence, life functioning naturally. But a week sufficed to disillusion him. The house they had taken appeared at first glance to be ideal, but, once inside, he saw clearly how cheap and borrowed the atmosphere. Or rather, he did not see, but sensed it. Feind, the interior

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

decorator, had completed a satisfactory job for himself, and the rooms had somehow the cheap appearance of stage settings. It was a house such as an actress of the people might have had furnished for herself, or a broker of East Side origin who had achieved wealth. It meant nothing to him. To Jean it signified culture and money.

"The best thing about the country," he heard Jean tell her friends, "is it's so near to New York. You can always run in to supper and a roof-garden."

He would have been very content there, had they let him alone and had he some work to do, but there was always a visitor—Olive Stockton was all but living with them, and he was discontented with her. He had heard vaguely the story of Peter Stockton's end. Also, he felt, she was not a good woman, and he loved Jean so much that he was fearful of the least contamination. He mentioned his objections to Jean.

"I'd rather you didn't pal around with that Stockton woman so much."

"Well, I like that!" Jean regarded him accusingly. "I'm not to have a friend any more. Listen, do you think you're in the middle ages?"

"There are stories about her."

"Just because she was a friend of the grand duke and of the count, your little town society wants to throw mud, because the people she associates with consider the kind of society you get your ideas from"—she meant his sister Derith he knew—"as dirt beneath their feet! My God! if a woman's a lady—"

"But she isn't a lady, Jean. That's why I object

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

to her." He had overheard a remark of hers, a cheap, obscene witticism which had all but given him nausea.

"She mayn't be what New River, Massachusetts, or Kenosha, Wisconsin, or Haines Falls, Vermont, calls a lady. But she's a lady in Paris and Vienna and Rome, and that's good enough for me." And she would hear nothing more about her, becoming more intimate with Olive all the time, continually visiting her in deshabille, both of them whispering low and laughing in John's presence, as though they were concealing something from him. It was only an interesting account of one of their friends getting drunk at the Quatz' Arts and of what he had said amorously in his cups. But it had an air of furtive indecency about it that John did not like.

Once Jean came to him laughing. She told him she had invited an elderly widower called Black, a lugubrious man with fish's eyes, and his two hobbled-dehoy daughters, for the week-end.

"He's perfectly daffy about Olive, and he's lou—he's simply gorged with money. If Olive could only hook him—"

"I don't like your friends being so profuse with my hospitality and using us as a convenience to further their plans. We're a convenience for everybody, it seems to me."

"Don't be a piker!" Jean had sneered, and in the end the lugubrious cotton-broker came to Harrison with his wide-eyed charges. And the week-end was conducted by Jean in the manner of the more staid portions of Mr. Robert W. Chambers's novels. Her only regret was that she did not have a gun-room

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

to serve tea in. . . . But nothing came of the experiment. The children, with children's terrible instinct, had shied at Olive, and persuaded their side-whiskered dad that other fields offered more wholesome flowers. And he married a Miss Van Vhroon, of Brooklyn, and was happily lugubrious ever after. He was succeeded in the week-end matchmaking parties for Olive by a son of Plant's, the legate to Greece, a callow youth with a Harvard accent, and by a colonel in the army, a bluff man whose intentions were neither matrimonial nor honorable, and by others in their due sequence and season. So passed these days.

To the house also came Bonds, the actor, who was as self-possessed and haughty as ever. He had fallen on a period of barrenness in his art, as he called it, for his company had let him go, having discovered him to be meanly dishonest. Had he been a decent, bold sort of crook they might have kept him, but the word had gone around the studios that he was the sort of person on whom no decent man could look without nauseating contempt. He was glad to have a place to lay his head, and was very aristocratic, very much one of the younger set around Harrison. At times John would find him colloquing with Jean, and the man would be very uncomfortable. There is a special look a man's face has when he is making love to another man's wife and is detected by her husband, a shamed and a little proud and somewhat defiant look. It was not that. It was a thing John diagnosed as much more shameful—something in which pride was utterly abased and fear took the place of defiance.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I wonder if Jean is lending that mucker money?" he asked himself, feeling certain that this was the case. He was wrong in a slight detail. She was giving it to him.

"Jove! I've made jolly nearly a million dollars in the pictures, but it's all tied up. Tell you the truth, the governor's been having rather a hard time. This blighted little Welshman, Lloyd George, has been playing the devil with the old families. I had to chip in heavily, you know, quite heavily. Couldn't let the family portraits be sold or the old estate go down. *Noblesse oblige*. Oh, rather!" By the Lord Harry! The man would have turned the stomach of his own father, who was a gravedigger at Hull.

"Listen, Beauty, you and I are pals. I'd never forgive you if you wouldn't let me help you out. You'd let a man do it." And then an artistic scene. "Dear girl, I thank you so much, but, you see—you don't understand," registering restrained nobility. "I can only say this—it isn't done." Of course, he would naturally accept the proffered hundred, for this was only play-acting. He was all right as an actor, this Bonds. I'll say he was!

Because he seemed to Jean the sort of person who should have things of the kind, knickknacks, semi-feminine jewelry, clothes such as none but an actor would wear, she was continually buying for him, and having charged to her husband's account, cigarette-cases, handkerchiefs of exotic design, golf-stockings, and in the end he was, instead of thanking her for them, looking on them as a sort of tribute and being put out when by some oversight she had

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

not the customary present each time she met him. There was a very definite reason why Jean made him these gifts. Britton, the aviator, thrilled her, but Bonds ennobled her. To feel she was so close to, so intimate with, greatness as to give it money and presents made her feel of the company of the noble and mighty. When Bonds's father died, and he would take his place among the peers of the realm, after having saved his ancient family place from ruin—was it not that he had been practically made to confess he was doing?—he would meet her in England, and she would be introduced to the great. Certainly by then she would have divorced John? Perhaps, who knows, Bonds himself would have come into his title—she wished she could make him say what it was. Earl of Bristol, or something of the like. The Earl and Countess of Bristol! Lord and Lady Bristol! She could see her photograph in the Sunday edition of *The New York Times*. The Countess of Bristol, who was the beautiful Jean McPherson, from New River. "Romance unites two noble families," the head-line would run. Bonds did not thrill her as Britton did, but he had such beautiful eyelashes—and, besides, Britton would be over and done with by that time.

She did not notice that Bonds was getting a little heavy about the waist-line and that into the registered nobility of his expression there was creeping the suspicious, rancorous look of parasites, of him who is waiting fearfully and snarlingly for his reign to end, and savors in advance in all of what must be its terrible bitterness the moment when he is kicked contemptuously into the street.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"You don't look quite yourself, Vernon," some of his women friends in New York told him. And at that he would strip his teeth and snarl. He was losing his grip.

"I'm not so sure I quite like Bonds these days," was a common word in his old haunts. "There is something in his manner, in his eyes. I wonder if he's taking dope." But the only dope he took was other people's money. A strong man could not accept that diet and live spiritually or mentally. And Bonds's frail, anemic moral tissues were already wasted, suppurated, gangrened, under its inroads. In a little while . . .

These parasites about him, this nervous, hysterical life, had sickened John Keogh to the core of the soul, disgusted him as a healthy man will be uncomfortable and shuddering in the presence and atmosphere of ill folk. They were Jean's, these people, this atmosphere, and she threw on them as an orchid blooms in an atmosphere of forced heat and rank dampness where a hardy, sane flower of the north would wilt and die as on an infected bosom. Let her have them, he decided, rather than dispute with her about them. In disputation he would always be beaten by her, for he was limited by his gentleman's rigid code, while there was nothing she would not say. For a time he had hoped that a child would come, and that fulfilment of her woman's destiny would, by its strange miracle, change her into the little dream-woman he had loved in New River, with whom he had companioned in his thoughts before he had married her. Long ago he had spoken to her of their having a son, or even a daughter, like her, but

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

she had turned from the idea with repulsion, dreading the physical strain. She had pointed out to him a heavy Italian woman on the street.

"Do you want me to look like that? Ugh!" she had grimaced aloud. And, silently looking at him with oblique glance, "Not if I know it!"

But later she had come to see that a child was precisely what he wanted, not so much exactly as a child—though she did not see this—but as a living evidence of the love he had for her, that he might love it, because it was Jean's and his baby, and because he felt, though he did not explain it to himself, that children were a certificate of citizenship on this planet, a natural obligation. . . . She was petulant.

"I can't help it if it doesn't take," she would laugh at her own humor. And looking at him with half-obscene glance, "How do I know it isn't your fault?"

In his heart of hearts he knew there could be children did she so wish. . . . Between them he had always kept a reticence of detail, a chivalrous modesty, though that meant nothing to Jean. She didn't care. . . . He was not a delicatessen-dealer, living in crowded, sordid domesticity with an anemic wife. . . . There were things he did not know, did not ask. . . . And they were not evident. . . . He blamed Olive Stockton bitterly for transmitting sophisticated knowledge to Jean.

It had been borne on him more and more, as days passed, that this marriage had been a failure. It had not been his failure, that he knew, and he tried to be just. None had approached a union with such ideals. None had ever felt so loyal, so chival-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

rous, so tender toward a girl as he had to his wife. And he was bound to her, no matter what happened, for he had given his all to her, love and affection and virginity, as a woman would give it, and his heart stayed there.

Well, there was nothing to do but make the best of it, to lose to fate with a smile and a gracious word as he would to an opponent in an athletic contest. It was nobody's fault—not his, not Jean's. It simply was not to have been. That was all there was, and be damned to it! But he would have to do something about his life to make it of some use. Things could not go on as they were, with nothing in life for him. That was as inevitable as death. He would have to put his hand to the load as everybody must. But he wanted to do it with a zest, not as a matter of necessity, like a time-serving workman. If he could only find something worth while, worth enthusiasm!

And about this time Jean approached him with a smile and cozening words.

III

She had said nothing further to him about accepting Hanrahan's offer of tips on the Stock Exchange, for she had a sense of fitness in where to stop importunity. She pushed an affair to its farthest and there stayed, never overstepping the border-line into disaster. But she considered he had had enough respite, now to push her plan farther.

"No word yet of when the railroad stock is to soar? Hanrahan has said nothing? Eh, Buddha?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Now look here, Jean," he told her, straightly, "I've been thinking this matter over and I've decided not to touch it. It's unclean."

"But—"

"No buts!" He was firm. Persuaded he was right, there was no budging him from his design. "It's not even decent, square gambling; it's loot."

"You're a fool—" she began, bitterly. But he stopped her.

"I'm not a fool. I'm just honest. Now look, Jean, if I bought stock outright in these corporations and held it for improvement, and improved it, I would be entitled to the profits. But grabbing shares on margin when I'm certain it's going up because I've got word from the inside that the game's being rigged—I might just as well put my fingers into every errand-boy's and every stenographer's pocket and take the nickels away from them as jump in on that deal. In the latter case I could pat myself on the back as a competent pick-pocket rather than be noted as a shrewd operator. Jean, don't ask me. I won't do it."

Her eyes narrowed into green slits of anger, but suddenly they opened wider with a sort of greedy joy, and there was back of them a set gleam of cunning, such as one notes in the red eyes of a fox. Coming up beside him, her right arm went about his neck and her voice took on the wooing, gurgling note that had in it something of the sensuous purring of a cat.

"If you say it's wrong, then it's wrong, Buddha, and I wouldn't want you to do anything that is wrong. But investing isn't wrong, Buddha, is it?"

"Not if it's a legitimate enterprise."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I want you to invest money for me, Buddha, a lot of money, in a legitimate enterprise," her accents faltered babyishly over the words, "because I'm going to make millions."

"Jean," he laughed, "you'd have us in the poor-house in a year. What is it you want to start? A cabaret?"

"Now sit down here, Buddha, till I tell you." She plumped him on a couch and settled herself on his knees. "I want you to listen seriously. You know Britton, the aviator. H'm! Yes! The one who flew from Key West to British Guiana. Well, he's going to start a big company for passenger and mail service." John nodded his head. The thing seemed feasible, and Britton's name would carry it, he felt.

"But you won't get in on that, Jean," he said. "There'll be a crowd ready to back him."

"Oh, but I will." She looked at him smilingly. "Britton told me I could have the whole thing if I wanted it." She played with her husband's watch, with the buttons on his coat, carrying on her babyish rôle. "Buddha, I've done a lot for Britton. I've introduced him around. He was just an ordinary mechanic when I met him. But now you ought to see him—spats and a flower in his buttonhole. He's very grateful to Jean for having helped him as she did, and there's nothing he wouldn't do for Jean. I think he's just a teeny-weeny bit in love with her—nicely, you know!"

He smiled. He understood perfectly, and did not mind, the adoring devotion of a worthy artisan for the society woman who had been gracious to

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

him—a silent worship as of the chauffeur for the unapproachable beauty whom he drives. A beautiful thing in its way, very pleasing to the woman and uplifting and ennobling to the subject. Life to John Keogh was an unreal language, such as Latin is to most people, who think of it in terms of Horace's lyrics and Cicero's noble disputation at Tusculum, having never heard of Juvenal's savagery or the cynic indecency which is Martial's. A very taking young fool!

"What do you say, Buddha?"

She saw that he thought well of the matter, for an instantaneous gleam ran across his face like an inspiration. Here to his hand at last was work and interest, unexpected, Heaven-sent. From the least probable quarter, and with utter suddenness, the solution had come, as it sometimes will. There rose before his eye a great design and the call to a career. He could see the 'planes in the air, like strange insects, or like those flying lizards which terrified prehistoric men. Their engines throbbed and hummed like a grotesquely gigantic mosquito, and already from the propeller he could feel the smashing blow of the churned air. So small, so powerful, so utterly daring—a splendid adventure for the sportsman, outrivaling the tracking of the moose and bear, and more intoxicating than a heady wine. . . .

"Do you think you could put money in that?"

"I think so." He smiled at her, while his pulse throbbed. Put money in it! Into what better thing could money be put? Isabella had pledged her jewelry for the Genoese navigator, and here was

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

America! Some valiant souls had trusted Stephenson, and now from the Golden Gate to the Hudson's mouth mammoth locomotives tore through the land, knitting commerce together, bridging a nation, joining friends, spreading untold benefits. Men had seen Fulton's dream, and across the rolling oceans man-made behemoths moved in great glory. Put money into it! He would be proud and happy to be among the least of its supporters. Here was something worth a man's while. To help in the development of that would be to have one's hand on the lathe that develops the world. A man's ambition and a man's sphere!

"Now listen, sweetie." Jean was serious. "I want to tell you something. Britton won't stand for any investment except it's in my name. He could get the money anywhere—you see. But it's only on account of what I've done for him he'll let me in at all. You don't mind, do you, Buddha? Say you don't mind. And you'll invest for me?"

"Of course I will. It's all the same to me whose name it's in, so long as it's in." He found it quite natural that Britton should feel thus. Chivalrous, he thought—a knight of the air! And one who loved Jean in his way, and was fashioning a new traffic in the crowded world. He would like that man, he knew. He had seen him once, and he had judged him to be a greasy mechanic—but how deceitful appearances could be, after all! By God! it was in people like Britton you found real heart, real chivalry, real honesty, not in the sleek-headed dandies who sold bonds in Wall Street, making capital out of friendships they had acquired at school and

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

college, on tennis-courts and at Junior League dances. How would they measure up in real worth against a man like Britton! Bah!

"You will invest for me?" Jean caught him by the coat lapels. "You promise?"

"Of course I promise," John told her. "I'm only too happy."

She wanted to jump up and telephone to Britton that she had got John hooked. Her limbs, her skin, her throat, tingled with impatience. But it would not do, she felt. There were still certain purrings to be gone through—a ritual of kissing, an amount of babyish nonsense, questions about love. To spring to the telephone right away out of John's arms, the word hardly out of his mouth. No! no! There was a technic to be observed, she felt intuitively. . . . A certain craft lost a brilliant operative when Jean McPherson married with civic and ecclesiastical consent.

IV

The little cabaret dancer watched Britton go through the room, picking up belongings here and there and thrusting them into a suit-case, and in her eyes were tragedy and contempt and the dumb look that hurt animals have.

"So you're throwing me down," she said, "because some society woman has taken you up! You're off now to a swell hotel where you can put on a Tuxedo in the evening and be the gent, eh? Off, just like that!"

He went ahead stolidly packing.

"I knew men were bad, Britton." Her voice was

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

colorless, utterly disillusioned. "Christ! Don't I know it? But I never knew they were as bad as you."

She was in that terribly cold and emotional state where men and women seem stripped of flesh and blood and are simply spirits. Spiritually naked, she was accusing as a ghost. And in spite of her draggled red kimono, her undone hair, about her there was great dignity, as about the wife of Macbeth.

"Down and out you was when I first met you, Jack, and I took you in. Now you got Tuxedos and fancy vests and fine friends, but then you had no under-wear and only one sock, and there wasn't a guy would give you a nickel, and I helped you out because I was sorry for you. I spent the money I was saving up for my kid brother to get a chance on buying you clothes, and I got you a job, Jack. I had friends in them days, Jack, before I took up with you. And they told me: 'Lay off o' that guy, Julie. He's a bad actor.' And I wouldn't believe them. And here I am without friends, without anything, and you packing your grip."

He went ahead callously, now wrapping collars in tissue-paper, now folding trousers carefully. In a drawer among his shirts he came on a piece of her poor vulgar finery, a bit of underwear all ribbons and laces, like an old-fashioned *cocotte's*. He flung it into a corner with a filthy imprecation. She paid no attention.

"You might go all over the city, you might go through any city, and you won't find a woman would be quarter as good to you as I was. When you was a chauffeur, and you got into trouble, it was

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

me had to square the cop; and I was a good girl, Jack, you know that, and for weeks I cried about it, and I've never felt the same since. But you didn't care. You cared for nothing but yourself. You remember the time about the kid, Britton—" her voice quavered and nearly broke—"when I was in the hospital with blood-poisoning, you never came near me for weeks. And I forgave you when I got out. Yeh! I guess I was a damn fool!"

"Aw, shut your trap!"

"Yes, and when you was in the hospital, Jack, and there was no money, you know what I done, don't you?" Her eyes were terrible. "You know what I done to get you things you wanted, things you couldn't get there, things that would build you up. You know what I done, don't you? And it made me cry every night, so that I 'most died."

"Aw, shut your trap! You'd 'a' done it, anyway."

"Yeh! You was always like that, Jack!"

He was nearly finished now, snapping the suitcase together with muttered impatient cursing. He was eager to get down to his Broadway hotel before nine o'clock. He had promised to turn up at a supper-party at the Quatz' Arts about eleven, and he wanted to get on a dinner-jacket. Also he was in a hurry to "get away from the holler this jane is putting up," as he phrased it in his mind. She was still looking at him in heartbroken tragedy.

"I'll bet you something, Britton," she prophesied. "You was all right when you was with me. I took care of you, I did. Nothing could happen to you when I was around. I—I'd 'a' made a man out of you in the end, Britton. But now you're off

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

after this society woman, and her and her money are going to put you on the bum, Jack. Something tells me it will. You had ought to stick to me."

"Aw, shut your trap!" He was opening the door.

"Ain't I ever going to see you again, Jack? Ain't you going to say good-by?"

"You can go to hell!" was his adieu.

He was gone. For an instant she wavered on her feet, and groping, for her eyes were blind with tears, she made her way to the little bedroom and fell across the bed. "I love that man!" she moaned. "I love that man!" she cried, aloud. "O Christ! Why do I? Why did you let me? Why must a poor woman suffer so?" Thus all night her litany went. "O God! I love that man! Why? Why? Why?" And night passed into twilit dawn. "Where's the justice in it? Why? Why? O Christ, why? . . ."

CHAPTER XX

I

THOUGH she had often left New Bedford Harbor on her way to New York, Derith had never felt such a lyrical sense of elation. The Sound liner quitted her moorings and moved with dignity and intense purpose down the waterway. An early June day was drawing to its close, and a breeze was in the offing, a keen, steady wind with the tang of salt and sunshine in it. Across the harbor two old whalers rotted at their wharves, their square rigging in the modern haven having the dramatic quality of a Crusader's armor in a city drawing-room. The bells of the fixed buoys rang clangingly, with the crisp note of a marine command. Farther off, a line of porpoises showed their sleek backs at intervals, whose precise regularity never failed to impress Derith, no matter how familiar sea-things were to her. Over the breakwater the white canvas of a schooner careened to the westerly breeze, and across the water came the chugging of a small power-craft. Against the rigging of the whalers and the sunny ocean it seemed as amusingly impudent as a small boy strutting beside a regiment of soldiers. The great waters permitted it as with an indulgent smile.

Standing at the taffrail of the boat deck, Derith

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

leaned over and savored the wind and the day. Gone were all her problems and in her head was only the intoxicating excitement of a new and great adventure, a blue electric horizon, which had no definite boundaries. It radiated through her whole being. Snatches of verse came to her mind, lyrical, irresponsible things.

"Then left those twain tall Dublin's towers behind,
With all its bannerets and banneroles,
A-strain upon the singing salt sea wind . . ."

She quoted from a young Celt's vision of Tristram and the Irish Princess Iseult's voyaging into Cornwall. There was no Tristram beside her, but she, as certain as Iseult, was journeying toward love, toward a Mark and Tristram in one. Life had suddenly called to her in her muddled affairs, and, dropping them, she had answered it as a nymph of the Grecian brooks might start suddenly and come cheerily over hill and valley at the call of the fluting pipes of Pan.

She smiled, a little proudly, at a verse in a book her stationer had sent her, a very crude translation of Chinese poems, recently printed. She had read a philosophy of Fu Hsüan's, which spoke of women:

How sad it is to be a woman!
Nothing on earth is held so cheap.
Boys stand leaning at the door
Like gods fallen out of heaven.
Their hearts brave the Four Oceans,
The wind and dust of a thousand miles.

Was there ever a boy as free as she was? She smiled again. Young and bonny, and she had a fortune by

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

her. The two years she had been executive over her father's estate had given her poise. There was not a young man on the boat who would not have been happy to stay by her all evening while the wind blew steadily over the Sound from the sea, and the low June moon hung over the waters. And many an old man felt his heart beat as he watched her, remembering epic days and wondering whether in another world life would not begin anew, with the glory and wonder of wind and waves and moon and the flowery hands of young women . . .

In a little while she would go in to dinner, and then, after an hour on deck, she would go to her state-room and undress and open her window to watch through the moonlight for some sailing-vessel along the Sound, a schooner out of Marblehead, perhaps, its sails and rigging black against the primrose moon—something strange and pure and beautiful. And she would read a book, not a modern study with its passionate problems, but something that had the same quality the Marblehead boat would have, something pure and pagan and very beautiful, like the songs her father's countrymen had written. To-morrow she would descend into the lists, to get her a husband and to fulfil her destiny. And so to-night she felt she must spend in virginal coolness, as young esquires prayed all night in chapel before they received knighthood.

"Boys' hearts brave the Four Oceans, the wind and dust of a thousand miles." She again smiled at the poem which was Fu Hsüan's. Was the adventure of men's lives ever so epic as the adventure of woman's? Women journeying out as she was

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

doing, looking for her predestined lover. Men became experienced of the world, and grew large in bone and sinew, in fulfilment of life, but over her when she had found her man there would come a strange sea-change, a mutation spiritual and physical. The adventure of men dealt with men, with killing them, as in war, the chiefest adventure. But a woman's province was bringing them into the world in birth. Not in this world, with its material of treasure, did a woman's function lie, but in that mystic borderland where Life expands into the strange and whispered symbol called Death, which she somehow felt was an illusion; in rough, inadequate phrase, like a curtain between rooms or like a high fringe of trees where a road stopped, and back of those trees was flowering meadowland, where brooks were full of the speckled trout, and the dogwood drifted, and the lark sang in the high air. . . .

And in this dark fringe of trees woman stood at times, and spirits who had a destiny to fulfil in the world of men drifted about her with needful eyes, asking for the shelter of her womb for a little time, and pleading for care for a year or so. They floated like apple-blossoms about her, and when she received them beneath her heart there was always the wonder as to who the guest of her body might be, and what he was to do in this world, and whether he would be successful or not. One grew so fond of this personality whom one had sheltered, and given of one's flesh and blood unselfishly to. . . . What adventure had men like that? To wander in a strange wood of souls, among the awesome, beautiful population, succoring them in need. . . . She felt the certainty that to

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

women who had been generous in Birth, Death would be very gentle. . . .

"How sad it is to be a woman!" Poor Fu Hsüan! She thought of the poet of the dynasty of Wei putting away his brushes and silken paper, very satisfied with himself. He would have sat down after that, adjusting his huge tortoise-shell spectacles—did they have spectacles in those days? Fu Hsüan she could not imagine without them!—fanning himself with conscious dignity, excessively superior, and seeming as wise as only an owl or a Chinese dignitary can seem wise. "You are dead these sixteen hundred years, poor poet!" she thought, happily, "and you know better now, Fu Hsüan."

II

She had a distant aunt, Edith Johnson, in New York, a relative of her mother's, a capable woman of forty, who had had to buckle to when her husband died and earn a living, or else marry again. A tall, buxom woman with happy eyes, she could have married a hundred times over, but she had cared for her husband with an immensity of love, and had not mourned overmuch when he died. "He was in terrific pain, my laddie, and I was glad for him when it was by. In a few years I will see him, and what is a few years compared with eternity?" She had a tremendous gift of wisdom, not of the knowledge of the intricacies of worldly life, but broad vision, love big as the wind, and friendship solid as a great rock. The legal associates of her husband had obtained for her a post with the city administration, a sort

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of confidential portfolio dealing with the problems of unprotected girls at crises in their lives. She threw herself into the work heart and soul.

"It may sound damned silly," a police commissioner once told his best friend, and only him, in one of those moments of expansion which even police commissioners require, "but the crackerjack record of the department is due largely to her. Whenever I was up against a problem that was questionable—Pat, you know what I mean—I would say, 'Would Edith Johnson have me do this?' And right in front of me I would see her eyes and hear her voice say yes or no. I'm not in love with her in any way; I've Nelly and the three brats. For Christ's sake, Pat, don't tell Nelly that! You know what women are!"

It took Edith Johnson about one hour to find what was in Derith's mind. She said nothing, made no suggestion or criticism. That was her way. Only by struggle and experience, she knew, was achievement gained in the world, and the man or woman who had to be guided through life, like one who is blind, would end, as a blind person does, when the hand is withdrawn, helpless, puzzled, very fearful.

"I'm going to stay with you a couple of weeks in New York, Aunt Edith," Derith told her, "and then let us go somewhere for the summer, where one meets people. You can come, can't you, Aunt Edith?"

"Yes, I think I can arrange it."

She was glad to have Derith with her, in that little apartment of hers on Fifty-third Street. Spring entered the room when she came and beauty abode

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

in the house. There emanated from the young girl an atmosphere as of brooks with green willows about them. She was better than flowers or water from a deep well. He would be a lucky man who would marry her—a proud and lucky man; on him a great responsibility would rest, for God made such women seldom.

Because she was warmly human, and had been young, too, and very full of life force, welcoming every natural emotion and enjoying it to the full, Edith Johnson could see, or sense, rather, what was in Derith's mind. She knew the young girl wanted to marry, to have her hearth and home and chubby children by the fireside. Derith had come to New York to find her husband, and the simplicity of it made the older woman smile pathetically. Not by fortuity did a fairy prince appear, and if by fortuity he seemed to do so, it was only because the designs of the gods were so much deeper and more cunningly hidden. But let her find out for herself. Inevitably the predestined man would come and she would know him, though he were among a thousand others. She might sleep, but her heart would wake, as did the heart of Solomon's darling when she heard the voice of her beloved that knocked.

She saw it this way, did Edith Johnson: that Derith would inevitably arrive safely at her journey's end—about her there were too many good wishes and the prayers of poor people and the guidance of kindly spirits, for her to go astray. Such as she never lost their track for long. But for the instant she had gone from her path, seeking a short cut through the wilderness, saying that beyond this

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

high grass the road turns certainly, and I may cut across it and save time. In a little while she would come to an impassable marsh into which she would either sink or at which she would turn back to the path. Sink she would not. Of that she was certain. At any rate, she was there to see Derith did not.

For a week Derith forgot everything in the riot of shopping, buying hats that gave the impression of flying wings, making her seem like Joan of Arc, and great black lace ones, that shadowed her face into a Celtic twilight, and gay sport things that showed her as she was, a bonny, healthy girl. She raided the shops of the Avenue for dresses that struck the golden mean between the exaggeration of little shop-girls and the rigidly staid quality of country gentlewomen. She was very joyous about these purchases, and friends of hers could not understand it. Meta Colt, that little cherub of East Twentieth Street, over whose deb career The Saunterer of *Town Topics* so often shook his paternal and undoubtedly kindly head, lisped in astonishment!

"Why, Derith, buying things just tires me!"

Meta did not understand that her friend had worked very hard for two years and had learned the wisdom of Horace about occasional dissipation; but Meta did not know what work was and had never heard of Horace, or, if she had, thought he was a male dancer, such as appeared in acts labeled "Mlle. Toutou and Gabriel."

III

At the Belmont race-meeting Derith came out in glory. She had gone there with Schuyler Peabody

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

and his wife, who were continually quarreling, and interest in the pair was focused from boxes, lawn, and paddock. There had been talk of a divorce, and a party at Cape May of which Schuyler had been a member. An automobile wrecked trying to beat a locomotive at a railroad crossing, and of some ladies of the ginger-ale highball set having been scattered. So people looked. . . . They saw Derith, and there were many who immediately remembered their close friendship with Schuyler and Bee.

"This is Larry Walker." Bee Peabody introduced a rangy citizen with a Roman nose, an awkward manner, and the hands of a baseball-pitcher. Derith recognized him immediately as the polo-man. He grinned amicably. "And this is Billy Blakewell," an innocuous youth with a waxed mustache and mild blue eyes—he was very rich and believed he was as good a comedian as Al Jolson. "And this," she said, proudly. "is the Comte d'Epernay Vallon."

A tall, muscular man with the savage eyes of a hawk and a great beaked nose was bowing to her. He seemed to blot the others out entirely, like some legionary of old Rome might tower above burgesses.

"You know my old friend, Charity Boyd, don't you?" Derith asked him, eagerly. His name was so familiar to her in the set her Charity had married into.

"La Duchesse de la Ferté-Voreux?" He nodded gravely. "Yes, I know her."

A shade of something like disapproval passed over his face, and Derith recalled vague rumors of what she had heard about Charity in Paris—undignified

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

things, parties, unconventionalities such as seemed to accord little with what she had known of the chocolate king's daughter. The first race was on, and conversation stopped there, but d'Epernay Vallon stayed.

She could feel him by her side all that afternoon, a presence that took an extreme curiosity in her, judging her, much as a jeweler would judge a piece of old silver, or a connoisseur takes delight in a picture of Sorolla's. She could never for an instant forget that he was there, so much did his presence force itself on her. As though obedient to an uttered command, Larry Walker, the polo-player, and young Billy Blakewell had gone away, and Schuyler and Bee Peabody had resumed their frigid and over-polite quarreling. But whenever she turned to him he was by her side, smiling the smile of a mature man of the world, and replying to her innocent queries as to whose colors these were and whose that—for though she knew horses, she knew them for their points and values, not as personalities of the track. He had the courtesy one connected imaginatively with the surroundings of the Hapsburgs or the court at Madrid. He pointed out to her the stars of the paddock: Ross's Sir Barton, the sensation of the three-year-old stakes, and the older thoroughbreds, Roamer, Corn Tassel, Old Koenig, Sweep On. His voice was deep and in its tones was courtesy, and his words, tinged with but the slightest foreign accent, intrigued her.

"Good-by, Schuyler. Good-by, Bee. Don't be a silly kid," she whispered. "Spank him, and forget the Cape May episode. Good-by, monsieur."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

D'Epernay Vallon bowed and was formal. "Mademoiselle!" was all he said. But she knew in her heart he intended to meet her again.

IV

"Did you meet anybody new at the races?" Edith Johnson asked.

"Larry Walker, the polo-player, and a kid called Blakewell."

"No one else?"

"And—oh yes! Count d'Epernay Vallon. You know of him. I don't know whether I like him or not." She was puzzled for an instant. "I think I do."

Like was hardly the word she felt for Berri d'Epernay Vallon. He seemed too big for that. Behind him was a great tradition. His ancestors had served the Eleventh Louis, when Villon stole and drank and sang in Paris among the Brethren of the Cockleshell. They had loomed big in the vile massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day. They had stood with Saxe at Fontenoy, when the Wild Irish Geese under Sarsfield, Earl of Lucan, had shattered the English line, avenging Limerick. "*Ce que je cherche, je trouve,*" their motto went. "*Ce que je trouve, je garde.*" An arrogant, ringing device: "What I seek, I find. What I find, I keep." A race of men, she thrilled at their memory, huge battlers in helmet and corselet. Their pennant had seen Acre when Bernard of Clairvaux sent Richard into Palestine. They had given allegiance to Henry of Navarre, walking in that chivalrous court that Pierre Bran-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

tôme knew, loving consummately, as was the fashion then, when Henri Quatre the king deserted Margaret for Gabrielle d'Estrées. They had been with Condé when he fought for the Roi Soleil, and they had intrigued against Mazarin and worried Colbert. They had been friends of Fouquet's, had heard Jean LaFontaine shyly recite his fables and seen Molière do "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme." Old days! Great days! And they helped people Quebec and found a New Orleans.

From father to son had descended a splendid tradition and each scion of the family had received a concentrated memory and manner of bygone days. They had been impoverished, until there remained now not even an acre of Champagne. *Magni nominis umbra!* The shadow of a great name. They once had had a sword, but those days were gone now, and war had lost its chivalry. Mathematicians and engineers huddled in dugouts over telephones where once Joan the Maid had ridden in the forefront of a host, carrying a banner of snow. Officers in colorless array now lorded it where once marshals of France in crimson and gold led their troops into battle, sword in hand. General officers of the new day who pore over charts and use telephones are soon forgotten, but Patrick Sarsfield, Earl of Lucan, who died leading the brigade, and Lancer Poniatowski, their names endure forever.

And Berri, last of the line, Derith loved the strange chivalry of him, who acknowledged no president of France, or upstart emperor, but clung to the band who called the Comte de Paris King of France. Berri was friend to Henri, Duc d'Orléans. His

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

name had been used oftentimes with that of the Bourbon Claimant and that of the merry old king of Belgium whom Paris dubbed Cléopold, but those stories were not for Derith's ears.

She met him again at the Garden Club at Pelham, wedged between the plump Mrs. Joe Worden and Homer Edwards's wife, who were trying to obtain from him informative scandal regarding Manuelito of Portugal, who was rumored to be considering a trip to the United States, and d'Epernay Vallon was assuring Mrs. Joe that she could really invite him to the house without having to provide quarters for the whole "Folies Bergères," at which Mrs. Joe seemed more disappointed than relieved.

Derith was being bored with Hobart Watts, whom some wag dubbed "The Ladies' Home Companion," a sweet young beau of thirty-five, when royally the Frenchman took leave of his matrons and came at her bow. He turned to Hobart.

"Mr. Watts, there were two ladies asking for you. Some man has told a joke about a Cherokee Indian and they want you to explain it."

He looked at her for a long moment, admiring her frock of mastic gab, and she was pleased at that, for his eyes spoke approbation, and approbation from him, who was so much of the great world, meant a lot. She liked the way he wore his gay tweeds, too. Few foreigners had the knack.

"I am glad you came," he said, simply, and with a sincere tone in his voice. She liked him for saying that alone, for she had the impression he was a man of easy, sparkling compliments, and though she was fond of compliments as any girl, they didn't reveal

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

the real quality of a man. Yes, she was strangely glad he was so sincere. Had she been another kind of woman he would have been lavish with them, but he saw through her very easily, saw she was the sort of woman who delighted in sincerity, so he made a very satisfactory imitation of the thing and handed it to her gracefully.

"I go everywhere I'm asked," she told him. "I'm just like a school-girl out on a holiday, or a debbie in her first year. You see—" she began, and she told him of her work at the shipyards, to which he listened, nodding gravely now and then, held by the intensity in her gray eyes. All of this he knew before, because he had put in skilful questions here and there, notably pumping Bee Peabody.

"She's got a big fortune," Bee had told him, not knowing he had subtly asked her whether Derith was rich. "She's not one of the richest girls in America, by any manner of means. Still and all—"

That was enough for Berri. The richest girls in the States were not for him. Of recent years America's richest women had showed a regrettable tendency toward marrying America's richest young men, forming one could hardly call it an aristocracy, but a cult or caste whose mark was super-riches. Also those of the richest class who did marry foreigners knew exactly the value of their money, and required principalities or duchies as their husbands' dower, and they were becoming particular about titles, too. Papal ennoblements no longer were currency. They demanded antiquity, though antiquity was no use unless the titles were big.

"I am not very much at home at garden-parties,"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Berri told her, and that she was ready to believe. He knew Madagascar well, and had been on a long expedition into the interior of Cochin-China. She could see him, in her mind's eye, there, a lithe, muscular entity in white linens and a sun-helmet.

"Sometime you must tell me about it. My father was a great traveler. He was a sailor. Java Head to 'Frisco, China and South America, he had sailed nearly all seas, and brought back something from all of them. He loved the East. He had a place in Jaffa once."

"He would have liked Cambodia," Berri told her. "Huge forests with the green of them all but black. Little temples here and there, and brown, very handsome people flittering in and out of them, smoking cheroots and having twisted daggers concealed on them. There are flowers there poisonous as snakes, and snakes beautiful as flowers."

He had been in Algeria, too, and he told her of the desert there, a pelagus of yellow sand, undulating, chopping, with marabout birds flying above it like monstrous distorted gulls, and the queer craft of camel lumbering in a line across it, like strange ships, and here and there a saint's tomb, like a white reef in brown waters. He told her of the strange desert folk, the Ouled Nail tribe of dancers, whose women were very beautiful. "A different type of beauty from yours," he said, in the most casual manner in the world, and Derith glowed at the tribute. He spoke to her of the magicians of the desert, sand diviners and black necromancers from Timbuctoo. "There is a legend there of a 'Lost Oasis,' a city beautiful as Damascus," he described it; "palm-trees and

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

bubbling fountains and story-tellers at all corners reciting the Tale of Ganem Bin Ayyub, the Slave of Love. And in that city they practise black magic. . . . A wonderful honeymoon," he pondered, "a caravan seeking the Lost Oasis, the sun going down behind the sand waves, and the sound of the Arab flutes." His vision descended on her like a warlock's spell.

He invited her and Bee Peabody to lunch often at the Plaza, at the Ritz, and by subtle worldliness assumed the rôle of accepted suitor. Of him yet as a possible husband Derith had not thought. Of course, vaguely there had been the irresponsibility of thought, but none of that definite feeling that catches the throat and sends a flush into the cheeks. Humbly she was thankful and exalted to go around with him, an unsophisticated country girl as she considered herself; him the companion of kings.

And so she met him through all the early summer here and there, at the Rockaway Hunt Club, for example; at the Metropolitan Golf Championship at Brooklawn, whither she had gone to see John play; and she was glad when he recognized the reason of her brother's poor showing. "He could beat the field," Berri had said, "but he's not trying. It means nothing to him."

She was aroused to the length gossip had gone about Berri and herself by an item in a New York society weekly:

Manhattan *quidnuncs* are wondering when Count Berri d'Epernay Vallon is going to offer his heart and hand to Derry Keogh. The former explorer and sometime friend of

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Henri d'Orléans has hardly been seen out of the company of the New River belle for a fortnight. Derry is one of the new guard at the Ritz at luncheon-time and is never seen without the attendance of her noble foreigner. Her sister-in law, Jean, still keeps to her happy hunting-ground of Broadway. On Thursday night at the Club de Montmartre .

She said nothing of the paragraph to him nor did he to her. But her heart fluttered in her bosom when she was with him. He had begun to speak to her of his family and how keen he was on her meeting them: his mother, who was a great friend of the Infanta Dolores. "You would like her," he said to Derith. "And she would be proud of you," he added, subtly. And switching the conversation, he let that sink in.

She could not but face the prospect now that one day he would ask for her hand, as indications were, and seek to lead her into the world he knew, that was so strange and beckoning to her, a world of courtesy perfumed with musk—the world of old-time royalty, and ancient memories in present days, and the world of the East that he seemed to love, a passionate, acridly perfumed place that attracted her strangely and at the same repelled her, like a door before which one hesitated, wanting to go in, magnetized toward the steps, and yet, and yet, and yet . . . He was so much a being of another planet that she did not ask herself did she love him—for had she asked herself that she must have answered truthfully no! But he did not offer himself, somehow; he offered an atmosphere. "I want to bring you to Fayoum in Egypt, a city of roses," so might his words go, "and on our way there we will stop at

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Marseilles and pay our respects to the Bourbons, and I must call on my cousin, our cousin, the cardinal." Very certainly one of these days he would come to her, and she could nearly frame his proposal in her mind. "I am Berri d'Epernay Vallon, an impoverished gentleman whose family has, in former times, cut swathes in history, and will, please God! again. Mademoiselle, will you marry me and honor my house?" What should she say? What could she say? Madame la Comtesse d'Epernay Vallon, and a world of princes, and voyages of Arabian Nights!

It was a wonderful vision, such as a magus might conjure with perfumed smoke and potent incantations, and the best of it was that it could be true. For days she reveled in the dream of it, enjoying it with an innocent sensuousness. There were only two things that hampered her savoring it to the fullest. She had heard from New River that the men were grumbling savagely in the yards, and that they contemplated striking. "Let them strike!" she said, bitterly, remembering that last interview when they had been arrogant as Germans. But the thought of them hungering distressed her. She had tried to be so decent to them, and they had been ungrateful and unkind to her. And yet she could not view with equanimity their suffering should it come to that.

Another thing: she had seen Angus on the street. Coming up Fifth Avenue at Fiftieth Street in a car with Berri and Bee Peabody she had noticed him sauntering down-town, bronzed, bulky in his dark-blue serge, very much the sailor. What was he

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

doing in New York? she wondered, and her heart jumped joyfully at the sight of him. His bronzed face, his iron jaw, the massive shoulders, set him above anemic city people like a giant of old days among pygmy men. What was New York to him, who had sailed over both Atlantics, and who was as much at home in the Sargasso Sea as most men in the security of club lounges. The sight of him dispelled her visions as a salt sea breeze blowing into a close perfumed room sounds the bugle call of life without, dwarfing artificiality and making it somehow shameful, vicious, mean.

She had risen to hail him, but there came back to her in time the memory of her parting with him, and her heart now, instead of being bitter, was heavy. The men had treated her scurvily and Angus lightly. What had she now but this man by her side and the world he opened to her? But the thought of Angus was with her all afternoon and through dinner, and she could not sleep for memory of his swinging stride through the weakling urban folk. She wished Berri would ask her right away.

CHAPTER XXI

I

BELLOW the platform, the crowd rumbled like threatening drums. There was in its movement something like the terrible ebb and flow of the sea. Above them Trevelyan, hatchet-faced, flashing-eyed, swung forward and backward in passionate gesture. His white teeth would snap after a sentence with the suggestive snap of a wolf. Occasionally there would be the rapid put-put of conversation, the clapping of hands like the cracking of sticks, the roar of applause like the swelling notes of an organ.

"You have seen a dog petted. Come, Fido, come. Here's a biscuit. Let's play around the trees. Jump up in my lap. And the next moment, down, cur, down! And so it suited Miss Derith Keogh, when other amusement was lacking, to accord you favors and pat you on the head. Anon comes another amusement, a little monkey from the West Indies, perhaps, and Fido is relegated to the background—kicked out as behooves him, the presumptuous cur. There comes a husband, and the workers are told to be about their business. Their sordid affairs are not to intrude themselves on the time of the high and mighty." He paused for a minute. "And yet you do not look to me like dogs.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"And yet," he quoted, "'as for my people, children are their oppressors and women rule over them.'" There was a terrible sneer to his voice. The men shifted, silent and shamefaced, in their seats.

"Are you men," he roared, "or are you discarded lovers? Playthings which have ceased to amuse a woman's idle hour? Is this God-given right to work of yours to be played with as a trinket, cast aside like a cheap bauble, ignored as a thing of no value? You will have food, if you stay in the works—even prisoners in jail have food. But I counted you as free men, fighting a great fight, not for yourselves alone, but for the workers of the world. Are you now, at a word of opposition, to quail like cowards, to have the charter of your liberties revoked? Not in every battle shall a miracle win for you, as the brazen trumpets of Joshua shattered Jericho's walls. The men of Ai hunted the soldiers of Joshua even unto Thebarim, but Joshua returned and Ai fell and 'the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves.'

"Listen, men, of old there was a God who had a chosen people, Jahveh, master of Israel, a God of fire and sword, whose people's life Egypt made bitter by hard bondage. They made just demand to Pharaoh, and for an instant Pharaoh's heart was inclined to them. But his heart hardened, and under Jahveh's lieutenants they were brought out of Egypt into lands flowing with milk and honey, where they builded temples, and overthrew kings, and the East was in fee to them. . . .

"You are the chosen people of a new day, and a new God has come to you, Christ Jesus, a carpenter

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

of Galilee, who raised himself from the dead. Jahveh of old had His prophets, Elijah and Elisha, Samuel, Isaiah, Saul. And Christ Jesus, who was crucified as you are crucified to show His kinship with you, has no lesser prophets, no lesser leaders than Jahveh of the Jews. I and a hundred like me preach a new conquest and lead a new exodus to-day. And I call you, to-day, out of the yards where you are treated like dogs, you chosen people of a new day! The men who braved the Red Sea and the Canaanite wilderness were no braver than you, and they had only a promise of a land of milk and honey, and you have a promise that you shall inherit the earth.

"Down with your tools and off with your overalls, like free men, and we shall harry this proud-necked woman until in humility she sees that you are not playthings, but an integral part of her life, the most important thing, for by you does she live. And until she recognizes that there shall be no peace unto her. Out! Out!" His voice was commanding like a soldiers' reveille. "Out! And do not fear for the morrow, for I, the prophet of the new God, prophesy to you, as Isaiah prophesied to the captives of Babylon:

"Come ye near unto me, hear ye this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning . . . the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me. . . .

"Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob.

"And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts; he caused the waters to flow out of the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

rock for them; he clave the rock also and the waters gushed out.

“There is no peace, saith the Lord . . .”

II

Though it was fifteen years since she had seen Belfast, when she came across with her husband from the shipyards there, she had not lost her Ulster speech nor her Ulster habit of talking to herself. Weary at the ironing-board in her apartment kitchen in New River, she stopped an instant to wipe her forehead.

“I wisht it was over,” she complained. “Ay, I do that. Three weeks it’s been on now, and no sign of it ending. Strikes are hard on women. They are so.

“I knew it wouldn’t last,” she told herself. “I did that. Queer and large pay they were getting, and the workers spending their money this way and thon. That pianola in the sitting-room, we had no call for it. I told John Campbell I didn’t want it at all. I did that.” She spat on the iron to gage its heat. “Three weeks ago there was lashings and leavings in the house, a pianola, and us having our dinner at the hotel. And now I’m taking in washing, and glad to get it. I am so.

“It’s no use having what you’re not reared to. I often heard my da say that, and he was a wise man, Master of an Orange lodge he was and greatly respected. Och ay! Too much money is bad for a working-man. When they get too much they get tight and come in and give you a skelp on the lug,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

though I'd like to see John Campbell try that on me. I would so." She hung a blouse on the kitchen line. "I'd sink that hot iron in his head," she went on, dispassionately. "Och ay! I would that. It's good for him he's kind in his liquor. Or if it isn't that, they get tired with the auld shiftful, and go skiting after fancy women, with red stockings and passementerie on their drawers, hussies a decent woman would no' wipe her feet on. I wonder what John Campbell is up to now," she pondered, "getting drunk and talking about labor and capital down at MacCracken's bar. The harder you're working the less time you have to make a fool of yourself in, my da used to say. He used so.

"Strikes are hard on women. They are that. Herself below now, I saw her going to the pawnshop twice this week, on Monday and Wednesday, and only three weeks ago she was buying plumes for her hat from the sheeny who does be coming around when times are good. The boy, too, him that was going to the Electric Institute, they've got to make a messenger-boy out of him. It's on women strikes are hard, and on children, too. I wish to God I had a new ironing-board. It would have been better for me nor a pianola."

She changed irons and settled the folded newspaper sheet more firmly about the handle. She wet her finger in her mouth and delicately touched the hot metal.

"Labor and capital are queer, now," she philosophized. "They disagree like man and wife. And mind you, I don't like the way the men are going on." She shook her head. "It looks to me

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

as if Labor was going to give wife Capital a taste of the buckle end of the belt. It does so. And wife Capital is none of them soft, kind women that a belting does good to, that kisses and is proud when her man blacks her eye. No! no! She'll have him in the court and get the judge to gi'e him a month in the black hole. If there's trouble," she prayed, "I trust to my God John Campbell does not get mixed up in it. I do so. If they get the police there'll be ruination. For the police are always hard on the poor. They are that. They are that, which is queer and unnatural," she thought, "for the police come of poor stock themselves. Well, no. For there must be a dirty strain in a man before he'll arrest another.

"Oh, Sergeant Patsy Brannigan, the terror of the country,"
she sang as she turned a petticoat—

"It must have been for dirty work you got the stripes so young!"

She was silent for a minute, her mouth full of clothes-pins.

"There'll be trouble, if the Delegate has his way," she mumbled, meaning Trevelyan, "black trouble and bloody murder. But what does he care?" quoth she, bitterly. "He has no wife and no children.

"Och, I wish they'd have sense!" She was impatient. "I do so. I wisht 'twas like the old times before they bothered about six-hour days or collective bargaining or fancy notions. John Campbell

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

would get up in the morning and go to his work as a working-man should, and after I had reddit the house I could sit down contented at my cup o' tea, and I wouldn't call the queen my aunt. I would not so. And I would see after his dinner, a bit o' tripe, maybe, or an Irish stew, something filling to the belly, and a bit thing for the sweet tooth to follow, a cup custard, maybe, or a tart from the baker's. It's damned little tart you'll be getting now, John Campbell! Let your principles be your dessert, gudeman. You'll find them tough eating. Och, ay! Maybe in the afternoon having a bit of crack wi' the neighbors' wives, a cup o' tea to pass the time, and a cake wi' raisins to bite on—a lord's daughter could have no finer time."

She inclined her ear to a muffled disturbance downstairs.

"That's him below coming home with a skinful of drink. I'd like to see John Campbell do that. I would so. Strikes are hard on women."

She pushed the iron to and fro with rhythmical muscular strokes.

"Not that any woman wouldn't stick by her man when he's in the right—stick till she'd die. But the men don't know when they're well off. They've got no sense." She shook her head. "None at all. A child at the breast would have more," she said. "It would so."

III

In his room above O'Connor's saloon Trevelyan was writing. The principal bedchamber of the sordid little hotel had been given him and every

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

effort had been made to make it clean and habitable for him who was to the workers something more than royalty. His decent toilet things, more in accord with the settings of a good club, were put here and there. In the cupboard his clothes, tweeds and evening black, were neatly hung up—the workers liked him to have those; they put Trevelyan on a plane to which they could look up more than his talents did. The linen on the bed was spotless, and on the dressing and other little tables. The poor, worn housemaid of the hotel had tried to beautify the room with an offering of wallflowers in a bar glass, and Trevelyan was seated in Pat O'Connor's favorite leather armchair, brought up from the proprietor's private quarters especially for the occasion. On his knee was a writing-pad. He was sketching an editorial for the local labor paper.

There was about his whole bearing a look of guilty triumph, and yet, back of his eye, something of regret. He had brought off a great *coup*, a scheme he had been working on for years. In a week or so now he would have the workers where he wanted them. Already through the country unions, locals, newspapers, were agitated over the Keogh strike, and the rights and wrongs of collective bargaining were being fought by tongue and pen. Already in the work yards that did not have them workers demanded their controllers, weighmen in the mines, clickers in printing establishments, shop stewards in the metal trades. In the shirt-and-waist-maker establishments men demanded the right to examine their employers' books. And angrily the employers were refusing that demand.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

More was needed. An inactive war could only end as others had done, undecisively, and now was the moment for decision. What was required was a little dynamite, a little blood, the flame and saltiness of which would travel among the workers as the Fiery Cross travels through Highland septs. Already eyes were focused on the New River strike, and in a little while those eyes would have a spectacle—one of fear for employers, and one of appealing horror for workers.

He had counted on the workers having saved no money from the privileges granted by Derith Keogh. He was right there. He knew the working-man. Money beyond his home wants he practically threw away. White kid shoes his women-folk had bought for themselves, much cheap jewelry, phonographs, vases from the big stores, extravagances such as a drunken person would indulge. There were few, an infinitesimal few, who deposited their money in savings-banks. In a little while they would hunger. They were hungering now. They were drinking, too, which suited his plans.

Pearson, the new manager of the works, had not as yet taken any steps to fill the workers' places. But already the spies and provocative agents of Trevelyan were abroad, saying that men were being hired in Belfast and Newcastle, about to come over in droves. The immigration law regarding contract labor was already a dead letter, a farce, when a corporation desired it. And little by little the rumor was eating into men's minds. A demonstration against the works was the next step, and while that was on, a stick of dynamite, a bomb

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

loosed here and there—and the campaign would begin. Troops would come; there would be no doubt on that score. The country was terrified now of bombers. Two calculated anarchistic campaigns of extreme radicals of foreign extraction had keyed men's minds up to tension-point. Bombs hence-forward would not be an outrageous phenomenon, but an expected act of war, to be treated as overt war and fought with picked militia in riot formation and the put-put-put of machine-guns.

In Seattle, in Pittsburgh, in Texas, in Canada, men were waiting for an outbreak such as this, picked workers of the I. W. W., who at the first shot in New River would stand at the street corners and preach the holy war as fanatics of El Islam with green turbans and quaint faces would proclaim the jihad. They were not unwashed tub orators, these men, but flaming personalities, and it was so planned that they would be guarded as they talked, by men who would murder rather than eat. The capitalist and the laborer had had about enough of each other, throughout the world; the time had come for a show-down. His hand, Trevelyan's, was the one to set the world ablaze.

Now that his plans were near fruition, he could indulge in the luxury of introspection, and it was strange to him that, but for two things, the scheme of labor and capital might have continued indefinitely, the word of a worldly priest and the idealistic heart of a laywoman. He could not be ordained because it was not for "the good of our Holy Mother the Church." How would they like it now—his teeth snapped and his eyes had the livid light of

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

wolves' eyes—when their Church came toppling about their ears, their fanes were desecrated, their vast treasure spoiled? "Woe unto ye, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" Behold, their house would be left unto them desolate.

When he was young he had worshiped among them, using the magic ritual of one Christian cult to express what he knew now was the pure pantheism in him. And he would have still been among them, happy in the peace of God that passeth understanding, translating their dogma into terms of mysticism that could have satisfied his heart and soul—had not the velvet harshness of the hypocritical priest recalled him from his atmosphere of adoration into a material world the motive power of which was the mistranslation of Christianity.

He saw a world which had been spellbound by the glamour of the Nazarene's vision smashed into a hideous discipline by the doctrinaires of Christianity. Men who had become as little children that they might enter into the Kingdom of Heaven were now treated as some little children are by harsh, venal, and ignorant mentors, who threaten them with the bogey-man of hell. Even now, he laughed, when, in certain industrial centers workers showed dissatisfaction, there was brought to them an evangelist, a quaint fellow, once a professional athlete, who had a hypnotic gift of rendering such a revolting picture of hell, only to be avoided by suffering on this earth and the grace of their employers' God, that the dissatisfied laborers quit grumbling at their lot to ponder over imminent damnation. They had made of Christ an arbitrary judge, who

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

had gathered about Him a band of anemic, torture-worn saints, condemning all other humans, notably those who showed dissatisfaction with the social and industrial scheme, to a hell of boiling oil and incandescent coal where devils, like mischievous boys, enjoyed themselves hugely by cutting slivers from human sinners and filling the gashes up with molten lead. The saved laborers were not so enthusiastic about being in the company of this cold and righteous super-bird as they were chary of being broiled eternally in hell-fire.

For other than the lowest class of workers there were the clergy of the ordinary churches who preached not the gentle, visionary Christ, but the hard, blind Paul. ". . . Whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions, are you not carnal . . .?" Strife and divisions there could not be among Christians. "Servants, be obedient unto your masters," said Revelation. All else was carnal, and carnality was chiefest of the offenses whose end was hell. Paul was their principal stand-by, the sordid, material Paul, who saw no beauty on earth. The mystic singing thing that marriage should be, the strange and beautiful alchemy of bodies and souls, this Jew of Tarsus saw only as a remedy against fornication. And Christ had pardoned the Magdalene and saved an adulterous woman from a death of stoning.

"Admirez l'artifice extrême." *

He quoted Voltaire's epigram on a statue of Christ in a Jesuit habit.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

*"De ces moines industriels;
Ils vous ont habillé comme eux.
De peur, mon Dieu, qu'on ne vous aime.*

"Note the extreme cunning of these busy monks," he translated to himself; "they have clothed you in their cassock, for fear, my God, you would be loved."

Well, in a little while—

And all this would topple the sooner because of Derith Keogh, who was only nominally of their creed, he felt. He saw her as a maiden of old times, a pupil of the Irish Druids, while Ossian was yet a young warrior and Patrick of the Croziers was still in cisalpine Gaul. She was Nature—chaste as a birch-tree, colorful and fragrant as a rose. The bees, a mysterious and wise folk, would do her reverence as they flew by, and the flowers inclined to her as she passed. And she was more than Nature, too—more than sap and verdure and intuition. She knew that the scheme of humanity called for sane and healthy progress. *Ut prosim* went the motto of her mother's family—"that I may be of service," and that typified Derith, body and soul, heart and fortune.

She was, he pictured her, a tile of colorful and valuable majolica in a wall of rusted iron and ignoble metals such as this industrial structure had shown itself to be, and because she was outstandingly fine and of delicate fragility it was against her, the weak point in the wall, that he was about to swing the sledge-hammer of fate, and when she was smashed into scintillating flinders, with pick and crowbar and battering-ram, his cohorts would raze that barri-

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

cade to the ground and enter, slaver-mouthed and red-eyed, into the land he had promised them.

He felt a great pity steal over him. Before her, he felt the wild animals of the forest would become gentle, the charging boar and the jaguar that spat and sprang. Neither would lightning strike her, but he must. And he felt a surge of anger sweep over him at the defection of Angus Campbell. There was a man, he had felt, who could have beaten him. As he had seen Derith a young earth goddess, a child of kindly Demeter, so he had seen Campbell like a subdivinity of the sea, broad-shouldered, muscular, utterly powerful, and utterly ruthless if aroused. Bronzed and weed-bedecked, and from him a great breeze blowing. And Campbell had shown himself to be a coward and a traitor, did one but look at it squarely.

"And I, who know men, had thought him worth fighting. Bah!"

Yes, she must go, and with her her class and kind must crumble. "Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

But there was not, as his experience went, ten righteous men in the city of unrighteous gain. There were not ten. Not five. Not two. Nothing but one chaste and lonely girl.

CHAPTER XXII

I

HER eyes, green as jade, shone like a cat's, full of malice as she watched, across the dining-room of the Ritz, Derith come in with Bee Peabody and Berri d'Epernay Vallon. For a whole minute Jean's face was suppressed with utter savagery. She envied her sister-in-law her poise of manner, her clear, wise eye, and the company of matrons like Bee Peabody and of noted men like Berri d'Epernay Vallon, and what she envied more than anything else was her being so much at home with them, of her being their equal. She leaned across the table to Bonds.

"Say, wouldn't that give you a pain!" she sneered. "Look at John's sister sitting down with that foreigner and the Peabody woman." Her face twitched with hatred. "Look at the Peabody woman smoking a cigarette. Wouldn't that phase you? Little Sister Derry, the strait-laced Puritan, going around with a fast crowd! Peabody's having a cocktail—" Jean had had two. "And a Frenchman!" She tossed her head. "Everybody knows a Frenchman has only one use for a woman."

Bonds regarded the table with a superior smile. He recognized d'Epernay Vallon from his photograph in the newspapers.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Dear girl," he soothed Jean, "people like that are very common. In England the fellow would not be taken up by anybody except Jews and city people. Oh, quite. I assure you. But then, American society! I often wonder how you can stand it, Jean."

"Look at what she's wearing!" As a matter of fact Derith had on a most taking black-lace frock and a black-lace hat. "Style of Kalamazoo, Michigan. Say, if I didn't know more how to dress for lunch in the Ritz I'd go to the Automat. It's the place for her, anyway, with the other stenogs."

"No chic," Bonds agreed. "Oh, dear Lord! no! None whatever."

A tall, statuesque blond woman, with a face that was magnificently queenlike and somehow very hard, had swept across the room to Derith's table. The three rose, Bee, Berri, and Derith, and Jean got the clear cadence of the unknown's voice.

"Hello, Bee! How d'you do, Berri? Derith Keogh, if you haven't grown up to be a beauty, you sweet little kid—"

"Charity Boyd!"

"With the help of God and a divorce-court judge"—the count stiffened disapprovingly—"in six months, again Charity Boyd. Turn around, Derry Keogh, until I see you. Bee, isn't she the loveliest thing that ever was! I'm going to sit down and smoke a cigarette while you tell me all about yourself."

Jean caught a full face of the reginal blonde and a faint feeling seized her about the midriff. She recognized the unknown from photographs in the society journals as the Duchesse de la Ferté Voreux.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Let's get away from this bunch of four-flushers," Jean snapped, savagely. "Society! I'm sick of it. Let's go somewhere that's not filled up with Frenchmen and easy women."

She swept out, Vernon Bonds following her, putting down a few last bills from a thinning purse. On the sidewalk she paused while waiting for her car.

"I'm afraid I'll have to go down-town, Jean." Bonds was nervous. "I've got to look for a chap who owes me a lot of money. I'll have a jolly hard job finding him." That indeed he would, an impossible job to find any one who owed him money. "But I've got to get him. Oh yes, I must. Never was in such a tight hole in all my life." He glanced at her sideways.

"Listen, sweetie." She pushed him into the car ahead of her. The doorman gave the direction "the Quatz' Arts." "Listen to me." She patted his hand. "I'm overdrawn at the bank, or I'd draw you a check for that seven hundred right now, and John left this morning for the golf championship at Braeburn or I'd get it from him." Behind her back he gave her a look of unleashed savagery. "But listen, deary. Now I'm going to be out to-night. You go out to the country and here's the key to my safe. Take out the pearl necklace and anything else you want and hock 'em at Simpson's—"

"Dear girl," he smiled benignly, "I couldn't."

"Now listen to me." She pulled his face around with her fingers. "Don't be a silly boy. I'll get 'em out when John comes back, and you can pay me back when your ship comes home."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"But really—"

"No really about it. Go out there to-night and get them. Don't let anybody see you."

"Is there anybody there?"

"There's that souse friend of John's, Al Norton. His club is getting fixed and he blew in without an invitation. But he'll be shooting dice with the village saloon-keeper. Don't mind him."

"He's a beast."

"Oh, he's not so bad. I'd get them for you myself, but by the time I'll be home it'll be too late. No, don't wait up for me. I don't know when I'll be back. It's business." They had switched into Forty-fifth Street, going toward Sixth Avenue, nearly deserted now at midday. "Just one. Quick!" She leaned against him as he kissed her. "Oh-h-h! Um-h-h-h!"

"You're a dear little pal to help me out," Bonds murmured. "If there's royal blood in democratic America, it's in you, dear thing."

"You sweetheart!" She squeezed his fingers until the rings there hurt him. Then a flash of angry scorn swept over her face as the picture of d'Epernay Vallon and Derith and Bee Peabody and Charity Boyd came back to her. "Society!" she snarled. "Pimps and loose women . . ."

II

For a week now, and that day especially, Derith had the feeling that d'Epernay Vallon was about to propose to her, and the thought frightened her somewhat. It was as though the royalist noble had gone

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

into solemn conclave with his ancestors, with his present circumstance, with his hopes of the future, and decided on this and decided on that, arguing pro and con with cold Latin logic, and once his decision taken, as she felt it had been taken, she was to be summoned to a table, as it were, and acquainted with the decision of the court. Though he should propose to her in a bower of roses, when the June moon was high, and though his wooing were as high and passionate and mystic as a Gaelic poet's, yet still would it be the logical decision of a court. Already he had assumed toward her a sort of proprietary attitude, not in the least overdone, but palpable. If she married him, she thought strangely, she would never more go into her father's garden.

She sat there in the Ritz while Berri told Bee Peabody something about the brown Malays, explaining to her the psychology of the quality called "amok"—she caught a word here and there, as she played with the *sole Marguery* and the glass of hock cup, but in her eyes there was a wistfulness and a little droop to the corners of her mouth. Marriage she had dreamed of as having a warm humanity and a high romance. Romance indeed it would be to have for husband a count of ancient France, whose kindred were princes of the Papacy, upholders of the Bourbon legend. Yes, there was romance. But where was the warm humanity of it? And she thought of men to whom a woman might be warm—there was her brother John, for instance, had all gone right with him. He would have been directing in his honest way the works in the daytime, and she could see him at dusk with golf-clubs in his

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

hand, practising approach-shots or running down long putts, very happy, singing snatches of her father's songs. There was her Irish cousin, O'Connor of the Fews, the young orator whom knowing men called a new Demosthenes, lilting with lyrical prose on the platform, in private talking like a prize-fighter. She could see him in the evening in tweeds and tousled hair, pipe in the side of his mouth, mending a fishing-rod. There had been Angus, too —she could still hear his voice as he went about the yards, pausing to speed up the workmen in his masculine way: "Why don't you make it snappy? God damn you, make it snappy!" At night he would sit contentedly reading his penny shocker, enjoying the adventures of King Brady, Angus who had gone unarmed into a stokehole to rescue an engineer from a crowd of crazed Spanish firemen who were trying to put the chief into the furnace, and had fought eight of them single-handed; or rendering Chopin on his flute—a hideous performance, but she understood it, as she would understand the eccentricity of a child. To any of these men a girl would creep up in the gloaming and, taking the pipe from their mouths and the book from their hands, lay her cheek against theirs silently, certain of understanding. But John was her brother, and oh! poor buddy John! And O'Connor of the Fews was her cousin and also married to a strapping Southern girl who could curse as delectably as he, after the manner of the Irish gentry. And Angus! She preferred to think of Angus as dead, as having died before that last interview of his with her.

Romance? There was romance at her elbow,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

this hawk-faced, hard-eyed man with the great name. And she would go with him into his country, and wear his title, and mingle with his kinsfolk who were all but kings. His children, too. She would bear his children, and the thought chilled her. O God! Where were the warm hands, the gentle eyes, and the eager, kissing mouths? And was romance so cold, then? And greatness so lonely?

And yet that was all! So life passed by, eating up years, eating up dreams, and in a little while one was experienced and wise and utterly saddened.

Her eyes met Charity Boyd's, who was now the Duchesse de la Ferté Voreux. She could never think of Charity as that. It was like a personage in a play some gentleman had conceived for the mummers. She was just Charity Boyd, her senior and her friend, who had become unaccountably hard in five years. Poor Charity, what was wrong? And this talk of divorce—that troubled her!

"What are you doing this afternoon, Derry?" Charity asked.

"I was going to the Ransome wedding with Bee and the count here."

"You are going to do nothing of the kind. You are going to spend the afternoon with me. Can you arrange it, Bee? Berri, don't be such a glutton. Derith Keogh was my best friend, and so"—she put her hand on Derry's—"and so I think her still. Please let me have her this afternoon."

"Berri was thinking of a slumming-party to-night—going to some of the Broadway cabarets."

"She'll be there on time for her slumming-party. I'll promise you that. Come, Derry."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

III

They had gone early for tea to the little confectioner's on Forty-fourth Street, where, because of the earliness of the hour and season, they were quite alone for the present. The fatherly head waiter had gone toward the window to philosophize on the meager crowd passing in the street. The waiter, a childish Basque, had disappeared into the kitchen door behind the screen. In front of Derith and Charity, the tea apparatus bubbled over the spirit-lamp. Derith's face was strained and a little white. Charity was speaking in harsh, low accents.

"Derry, after six months of it I cried every night, cried hard. Oh yes, I could cry; I was alone—he didn't even have that use for me. They can talk about an old maid being lonely, but an old maid is happy. She is at home. She is not an exile. All Voreux's people were about me, but all inimical. Voreux had sold the name for money, and I was looked on as a person is looked on who has driven a hard bargain for the family plate. But the second-hand merchant doesn't live with you, as I did with them. You are spared the sight of him. Derry, I was like the bailiffs in the house."

"Derith, you remember me at school five years ago. Tell me, have I changed in those five years?"

Derith would have liked to say no, and as she decided to say it her voice faltered and Charity laughed.

"Old Derry!" Her laugh was gentle and with perhaps a little hysteria in it. "I know I have—so that I am hardly recognizable. But I didn't change

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

in five years. I changed in a month or so. An alien house where a mother hated you, and where your husband looked on you as no more than a tin cash register, to be locked, of course, but only a thing of metal; where the friends of the house, young whippersnappers, who played at boxing and football because it was *très anglais, très chic*, looked at you as though you were a pretty housemaid and were not averse to having an affair with you, if it could be kept from the master of the house. I tell you, Derry, it was hell!"

She was silent, and then came into her eyes a savage look that all but terrified Derith, so much did it hint at repellent darkness.

"I knew Voreux was carrying on with a woman. There were four of them while I was there—women from the Folies Bergères, Parisiana, God knows what gutter. Sophisticated, viceful beasts. And Voreux, I suppose, talked to them about me, answering their questions as to particulars of temperament and body. '*A-t-elle des jolies cuisses, ta femme américaine?*' O God! '*Est-il vrai que les américaines sont toutes d'une froideur, dis?* *Et madame la duchesse alors?*' At times there would come over me a flood of blushing as though I knew I were being insulted horribly, undressed for the delectation of the Paris underworld. Derry," she said, pathetically, "your poor friend had a hard time.

"Of course, other women in my position would have contracted shady friendships with other men, fallen into clandestine love-affairs. Oh dear, there are so many and it's such a pity. But I didn't, Derry; you'll hear different, but I didn't. I went

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

around here and there to various places, everywhere, and I met and was friends with strange people. I've had lunch with a buyer from the Middle West in the Café de Paris. I was so glad to see a face from home and hear a man from one's own people talk about a baseball game and corn on the cob and to listen to his simple chivalry, no matter how provincial, parochial, it was. It was honest and clean and sincere. I met a good many strange ones. The American colony I kept away from, for they are dogs, Derry. They are ashamed of America. They curry favor with every one who hates it by damning it and laughing at it. You'll hear about the caprices of the duchess, if you haven't already—about her being friends with the prize-fighter MacCarthy, a great, big, simple kid who thought that the masculine of duchess was Dutch—honest, Derry! And Art Fellowes, the gambler—there's a man as chivalrous as a knight of the Round Table. He would throttle another man for a loose word in a woman's presence. And there was Simon Miner, the golf pro. who beat them all at La Boulie, your brother John's friend. I called him Simon and he called me Charity, and he invited me to have lunch with him at Rogers's when I would come back to America, the dear! All of them so honest, so clean, such good friends to me, Derry, you could hardly believe it.

"Of course everybody damned me for knowing Art and Simon Miner and MacCarthy, and for having lunch with the buyer at the Café de Paris. I was betraying my class, they said, deriding my position, but I had bought the position, Derry, with clinking coin, and I had found it a rotten bargain,

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

a pinchbeck trinket. Couldn't I throw it in the discard if I wanted to?

"There was the worst of it, Derry. You remember I had no relatives but distant ones, and when my mother died Patrick Boyd died, too. I was alone and had all my money. I could do as I liked with it, and all Voreux thought I would do was to sign checks. And I did it, too, all the time. There was a ritual to it." She smiled bitterly. "There was nothing honest about it like a man rushing in: 'I want ten thousand dollars, Charity. Hurry up, woman, for God's sake! The bailiffs are outside!' No, no! He would inquire whether he could wait on madame. And how was madame's health? And madame was especially blooming. Oh no, he had not found Biarritz amusing, rather a bore. He had made his plans for the summer for all the family, necessitating an outlay of—ho! ho! hum! *Mon Dieu*, could one tell to a cent? *Merci, madame*. Call that a man? He might have been a duke, but, good Lord! a barber would have been less fulsome. . . .

"And here was the worst, Derry." And there were tears in her eyes. "He thought and his mother thought that what was between me and the other men I knew, MacCarthy and Simon Miner and Art and the buyer at the *Café de Paris*—yes, Derry!—was not innocent, but criminal. *Une duchesse qui s'amuse à faire la noce avec des galopins de rue: une Messaline, tout court!* And while they thought that they said nothing, but Voreux still came around with his ducal mannerly way of asking for money, when *maman* wanted to go to Aix-les-Bains, or when

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Blanche Eckstein wanted a pearl necklace for her costume at the coming *revue*, or when a ball was given for Bourbon bastards and South American diplomats and Balkan royalty. Still the smiling eyes, the graceful manner, the high, rarefied tone.” She smiled terribly. “The last time I came away, after an interview with him, I could stand it no longer. He came in, leering, and when he said what he wanted it was the first time I was nothing but icily polite. I refused flatly. Then he started whining. ‘It’s only fifty thousand francs, a bagatelle; you can spare it. Only fifty thousand francs!’ I told him he was like some lean old prostitute, leering, whining, worrying a client for an extra dollar—”

“Charity!”

“Yes, I told him that!”

“Oh, my dear!” She had a picture in her mind of Charity’s wedding, a splendid pageant in a Fifth Avenue cathedral, with a bishop in robes of gold, with miter and crozier, blessing the union. Priests chanted according to their rite, and the organ swelled its great throat like some monstrous songbird, and the solemnity of incense arose in the air. Voreux, dark, splendidly noble with his air of a prince of France, knelt by the side of Patrick Boyd’s daughter, who was a bride out of a romancer’s book, gentle and blushing and inexpressibly virginal. It had seemed like the dénouement of a fairy-tale of golden times—the proud, romantic son of royal France and his blond girl bride.

“And so they were married,” she could read the story ending, “and lived—”

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"I said," Charity mused, "'you impress me as some lean old—'"

"Charity! Charity!"

"And then I made out the check—and he took it! Good God! he took it." The duchess laughed hysterically. "It was too funny, so I came away . . ."

IV

Jean met Britton, the aviator, in the lobby of the new hotel, the Commodore, which had become somewhat the fashion with her because it had been recently built. Britton had brought along a yellow roadster, powerful as an airplane, and he himself was gotten up with Broadway chic, remarkable for its obtrusiveness, a violent tweed, cut in a military fashion, with a double-breasted fancy vest, and a cap that either a duke or a prize-fighter might have worn with distinction, but which made him to be what he really was, a cheap chauffeur. She, although her little hat was Tappé and her outing-frock from Hickson's, gave the impression of a chorus-girl, or a successful *ingénue* of burlesque. Broadway nodded at them approvingly.

They sped along Fifth Avenue to One Hundred and Tenth, and, turning west, followed Broadway across the bridge, swinging into the Westchester direction and the Boston Post Road. The cool quality of early summer greeted them as they neared the city line. Buses passed them filled with a joyous, motley crowd going to City Island amusement-places, boys from the Bronx, dressed in comic imitation of moving-picture heroes, and girls in their

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

first summer finery, intent on the adventure of dancing in halls where the laws against "spieling" and "shimmying" were not as rigidly enforced as in cosmopolitan centers. On them Jean looked with an amused tolerance, very *grande dame*, while Britton dismissed them with a muttered cheapness about Jews. . . . Here and there were glimpses of the Sound, warm waters colored by the sunset into magnificent russets and golds, while along the road the grass struggled to keep green in spite of dust and odorous gas, and an occasional wild flower fought gallantly, wilted at birth. And here and there were trees, and stretches of meadow, and dells where spring still lingered, and in the east was a white moon.

"I wouldn't give one street of New York for all the country in the world," Jean decided, aloud.

"It's too hot to dance in the city in the summer," was all Britton had to say. He turned the car into a roadhouse restaurant, near a public golf-links, a place of white stone and green grass, very country as city folk of the actor and vaudeville class understand the country. They parked the car and went into the dining-room.

Without, the night was sweet and perfumed, fighting for the softness of nature against the bulwark of the city near by. Birds sang their last songs of the day in the branches, and, though one could not see nor hear, one could feel the water near by. And through the underbrush there was the rustling of life, and belated bees sped homeward in the silver dusk. The moon rose higher above the tops of the trees, a tinge of life appearing on the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

white surface as the sun dropped farther below the western skyline. Without was summer. Inside, a certain stuffiness was in the air, the acrid smell of cocktails and strong cigarettes, and of the muscular exertion of dancing. Little electric lights in rose-colored bulbs shone at every table, giving the place a perverted clandestine atmosphere, as against the tall trees and the silver moon without. And, in a corner, an orchestra shivered with epileptic harmony, as the jazz band of three colored musicians rolled their eyes and smashed at their instruments, as players in a voodoo lodge might have done on some secret Haiti night.

"Those dames certainly did get my goat to-day, Britton." She had told him of meeting Derith and her friends at the Ritz, and all through the journey on the road she had given vent to sneers of chagrin. "That sister-in-law of mine going around with a Frenchman! She's the sly one! And you'd think butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. And Mrs. Beatrice Peabody, wife of Schuyler Peabody third! Don't they think I don't know about her? And everybody else, too? There was a piece in *City Gossip* this week about them. I don't blame him. She, with her bobbed hair! And that other woman. Say," she tilted her head back and looked haughtily out of her green eyes, "if that's a duchess, I ought to marry an emperor!"

"Aw, forget it and have another cocktail. Say, there's none of them has it on you. You should worry. And you'll soon get rid of that sister-in-law. Once you get the coin out of that boob husband of yours you can get your divorce right away. Two

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

double Martinis," he ordered. "And say, fello', what about those eats? Tell that kitchen mechanic of yours to shift his gears. What do you think we're here for? The week-end?"

"Britton," she laughed warningly, "I'm getting loaded." Already there was in her eyes the limp light of intoxication. She had eaten no lunch that day, so consumed with rage had she been in the Ritz, and for tea she had had two or three cocktails at the Quatz' Arts with Olive Stockton. And it was beginning to tell on her. Britton watched her with lynxlike eyes.

"There'll be many a guy envying you a couple of weeks from now," he laughed. The orchestra broke into a fox-trot. The drums rattled like a sudden fire of musketry. The piano, under the hands of a gigantic habitant of San Juan Hill, crashed into a harmonious dissonance with a strange, nervous tempo, the player raising his head and breaking into a hysterical, animal laugh that was more like a howl than laughter. The banjo twanged under the fingers of a wizened, vicious Harlemite, who rose from his chair and sidled sideways, in the manner of a Hawaiian dancing-girl.

"I got the alcoholic blues," he sang. "Oh boy!" Then a cackle of running laughter from his throat. "Ho, bébé!"

"Come on, let's dance." Jean rose from her chair, gulping the last of her cocktail. Her shoulders shook to the music. Britton and she went into a sliding glide around the small, well-filled dancing-space.

"Say, what time have you got to be home?"

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Me?" She shrugged her shoulders. "Any time I like. I'm out on a party."

"I got the alcoholic blues!" went the voice of the banjo-man. His eyes were closed and, standing still, he moved from side to side with queer jerks of shoulder and chin. "Oh, sweet patootie!" he howled, grotesquely.

"Ring up and say you're staying the night with Olive Stockton, hey? Can't you do that, hey? Will you do that little thing for me?"

"Britton, you're a bad egg," she laughed.

The piano-player had swung onto the back of his instrument with his feet to the dancers and his nose to the keyboard, and playing as well as though in front of it, he was ripping out syncopated chords.

"Come on, let's shimmy," Jean laughed.

"I got the alcoholic blues," the banjo-player continued to sing. "Oh, sweet prohibition!" The drummer, his face set in a saturnine mask, worked like a frenzied spirit. "Hi-yah! Hi-yah!" he barked occasionally, and rattled a cowbell, letting it fall with a crash, to pick up a whistle and shriek like a train.

The moon was high and benignly golden when they left the restaurant, and along the white roads the tall population of the trees moved past the hurried car with tremendous dignity, like Druids. By them the wind sang in a muted Æolian chord, and the multitude of grass swayed as though battalions of souls were passing over it with harmonious milk-white feet, and as they passed the Sound, here and there flashes of moon-enlightened water came to them, a minute frequency of iridescence, as if

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

the secret little people of the hills were sailing in Lilliputian ships of silver and jade. But they noticed none of these things; they were eager to get to Mamaroneck, where the next drinks were.

"Must I hesitate?" Jean was singing, with a strange African drone.

"Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust,
If the booze don't get you—well, the women must.
Will you tell me how long do I have to wait?
Do I get it now, or must I hesitate?"

At a village half-way they stopped and went into a hotel with a pretentious name, a sordid sort of vicious place, with a leering air on its faded gilt sign and worn porch as on the face of some old procuress. In the parlor where a gramaphone was they were served with drinks by the proprietor, a servile, rapacious-looking Oriental with hooked nose and reptilian eyes, who affected an empty air of breeziness. They set the gramaphone going and danced as their drinks were served. When they left they were both palpably unbalanced. Jean's whole walk, pose, look, spoke of a loosening of inhibitions, while Britton seemed somehow more reckless than usual. He whirled around the corner, shaving a lamp-post.

"See you again!" the saloon-keeper waved a farewell from the porch.

"Not if we see you first," Jean answered, with Broadway repartee. They sped toward Stamford. "Where are you going?"

"You'll know pretty soon, all right," Britton told her.

"So long as it's not home," Jean laughed, "I

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

should worry." A sort of languor was settling on her, and the crash of jazz music was forgotten for the minute. The strange mysticism of the night worried her a trifle, depressing her, but still she must sing.

"I am always chasing rainbows,"

went her strong, tinny voice,

"Watching clouds go drifting by.

My schemes are just like all my dreams, ending in the sky...."

There were fewer automobiles on the road now. It was almost deserted. Still the trees went by, like stately Druids, and from the fields on either side came a persistent perfume of honeysuckle and wild roses, and the grass still shivered as under a procession of lightly stepping feet.

"Some fellows look and find the sunshine I always look and
find the rain;

Some fellows make a winning sometime, I never even make
a gain,"

they both sang.

"Believe me, I'm always chasing rainbows, waiting to find
a little bluebird in vain."

The car was flashing along the road like a yellow meteor, its engine roaring, but it went past the trees and under the moon like a trifling, annoying insect on this night of some ceremonial of souls. Jean leaned toward Britton.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Kiss me, Jack," she called to him. "Damn you! Kiss me!"

He put one arm about her, steering with his powerful left hand. "When is that husband of yours going to come across with the coin?"

She pulled him toward her, reckless, with a passionate sound in her throat, and the car swerved, interfering with the majestic procession of the trees. And it was tossed aside and they with it, like something a gigantic power had stopped and broken.

And as they lay there dead, twisted, broken, there was a feeling that they were utterly dead, annihilated, that nothing of them passed under the high and secret lintel. Their souls, such as they were born with, they had starved until they died. And their brains were dead at the roots, and they had only the cheap, valueless cunning of the parasite dog. They were nothing now, who had only been bodies to feed, adorn, and satisfy. For them there was no majesty, no terror, no kindness. For them the trumpet of Gabriel did not sound in welcome nor the sword of Michael flash upward in salute. For them was no stern Justice on a throne, accusing them of great trusts broken and talents squandered. For them there were no tender, white, impalpable hands to help them, world-scarred and battle-weary, into that bower of rest which is called Abraham's Bosom. None awaited them. They had only been an annoyance to Shane Butler Keogh, whose treasure they had seen and desired to ravish, and now they were nothing. And Shane Butler Keogh could go about his ghostly affairs henceforward with a measure of peace.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

They lay there dead. Above them the world of the moon rode in chaste splendor, and about them the tall trees were, dignified as Druids. A perfume which would be no longer for them came from the fields of honeysuckle and wild roses. The grasses whispered beneath trooping, happy, invisible feet, and the little secret people of the hills put out to sea in their microscopic boats. . . . They had been part of the audience in the mystic spectacle of life, and they had been rowdy, inattentive, annoying, and so they had just been flung out casually, contemptuously. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII

I

AL NORTON was not down at the village saloon, shooting craps, as Bonds had been told he would be. He was comfortably ensconced in the morning-room of the Keogh house at Harrison, sipping highballs and reading Strabo's geography, enjoying himself hugely. He delighted in the ancient Roman's account of Ireland, "concerning which we have nothing certain to relate, further than that its inhabitants are more savage than the Britons, feeding on human flesh, and enormous eaters, deeming it commendable to devour their deceased fathers . . ."

"And I was told," he complained, bitterly, "that this was a land of saints and scholars!"

A terrified housemaid called him to the telephone.

"Oh, sir!" she cried, fearfully. "Oh, sir!"

"Are you sure?" he answered the Stamford police. "Quite certain, eh? . . . Back broken? . . . Quite dead? . . . Anybody with her? . . . Britton? Not Jack Britton? . . . Dead, too? . . . I see. . . . I'll get on the job right away . . . Not Mr. Keogh; Mr. Norton speaking. . . . I don't know where Mr. Keogh is, but I'll attend to telling him. . . . Leave it to me. . . . Thank you. . . ."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

He turned back to the morning-room and poured himself out the stiffest drink of his life.

"God forgive me!" he muttered. "I can't pray for their souls."

He went to the telephone and made frenzied attempts to get New York. He got Angus Campbell in his hotel.

"Hold on tight, Campbell. Listen. John's wife has just been killed in a motor accident with a man called Britton whom she had no right to be out with. John's up at Braeburn playing in the open. What'll I do? He was cracked about that girl, and you know what she was. And now this last thing. . . . All right, I'll hold the wire. . . ."

He sat there waiting a full three minutes.

"Yes, I'm here. . . . I can get a car and drive up there right away. . . . Sure. . . ."

"Oh yes, I guess he'll quit; he's 'way in the late eighties on his first day's score and he doesn't stand a chance. . . . Don't let him get telephone message, newspaper, telegram, or anything? Yes, I see. . . . Tell you what. I'll act like an amateur drinker on a toot, and make him come along to take care of me. . . . Where'd you say, Second Avenue and Twenty-third, Rahilly's? Wait till I get that down. . . . Now what? . . . Let Rahilly feed him a drink and leave the rest to Rahilly? . . . Tomorrow night about nine? . . . Good! . . . Don't worry; leave it to me. . . . I'll attend to the woman's burial. . . . I got some friends in Greenwich 'll help out. . . ."

"What? . . . Of course, of course. . . . Derry is staying with her aunt Edith Johnson, somewhere in

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

the 'Fifties. . . . She's in the telephone-book. . . . Johnson—Mrs. Edith M. . . . Trouble in New River—machine-gun and militia? . . . The hell you say! . . . Good! . . . Good! . . . Sound man! . . . That's all? Fine! Good-by!"

He rang for the housemaid. All trace of his genial drinking and dilettante toughness had passed from him. He was keen, poised, watchful.

"On the other 'phone get Leamy's saloon in Cos Cob. Speak to Leamy himself. Tell him Mr. Norton wants his big touring-car at once, ready for an all-night run. Tell him he wants one of Leamy's own boys to drive it. Send Boggs up to my room to lay out some tweeds for me. Have some coffee and cold meat for me right away. Who was that just came in?"

"Mr. Bonds, sir!"

"Ah, Mr. Vernon Bonds. Did any one speak of the accident to him?"

"No, sir! He went straight up-stairs to his room—the room he has when he's here."

"Good! I'll speak to him myself later. Also, when I'm away and until I get back you are to take all orders from Mr. or Mrs. Weggandt, of Greenwich, one of whom will be here soon. I put you in charge of the other servants. I have complete authority. That will be all. Hurry up about the clothes and food and the Leamy car."

"All right, sir."

He turned to the telephone again and called up a Greenwich number. "Campbell is a godsend," he mused. "I wish Derry would marry him, and I'd have them all off my mind. That Greenwich?

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Mrs. Weggandt? Oh, that you, Anne? Listen, Anne, is Jack there? . . . Turned in! Turn him out and send him to the 'phone. . . . Anne, my girl, this is serious. There's a lot of trouble where I am, and I want you both to help. . . . Good girl! . . . That you, Jack? . . . Listen, son. . . ."

He rose from the 'phone in the end and with a stretch of relief. "All nearly finished," he said. "Now to change and to get some sandwiches and coffee." He went up-stairs, pulling off his dinner jacket as he went. "I think I'll wear the heavy Scotch brogans when I talk to Bonds. I wore dancing-pumps when I booted the bishop, and it wasn't half as satisfactory as it might have been."

II

The light from Bonds's door at the other end of the corridor was shut off suddenly, and Norton, standing at the head of the stairs, saw the movie actor's figure dash rapidly across to Jean's room and enter it. And no light shone from that room, either. There was a glint in the man's hand as he crossed the passage, and Norton did not know for an instant whether or not it was a pistol. He walked noiselessly up to the door of Jean's room, but there was no light there, and, listening, he heard Bonds within, breathing heavily, as though he were kneeling down, and there was the jingle of keys on a ring.

"Oho!" Norton smiled. "Oho!"

With incredible lightness and speed for a man who drank his twenty-five drinks a day, and over whom the medical faculty of America shook their

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

heads, Norton went down-stairs to the telephone and snapped a message to Central. He called the maid who was laying out his snack in the dining-room. "If an officer comes, show him to Mrs. Keogh's bedroom." He left her gaping. In his own room he picked up an automatic pistol.

"I don't need it," he grinned, "but it'll make him feel more at home—climax in reel four!"

He switched the light up as he opened Jean's door, and before the open safe he saw Bonds kneeling. There was a glint of light in his hands as he put into his pocket a pearl necklace that Norton had often seen on the young matron's neck, and he thrust his closed left hand into his trousers-pocket with a dull clink as of rings.

"Ah, Mr. Bonds!" Norton greeted him suavely.

The motion-picture actor stood up, and his face had become piteously white. His weak mouth sagged and his hands trembled. One got the impression of a boxer knocked out cold on his feet.

"Can I help you?" Norton's voice was sweetness itself. "Can't I hold the bag for the loot? Or is that the term?"

Bonds gulped hardly. Then he smiled, a very wan sort of smile.

"You misunderstand the situation, I assure you. Oh yes! Oh, quite! You see—oh yes. Oh, quite! I admit it looks peculiar—"

"To me it seemed damned natural!"

"You see, it was just this way." Bonds had for the nonce regained something of his brazen nerve. "Mrs. Keogh just asked me to examine, as it were, this necklace, knowing I was a connoisseur of jewels."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"She asked him to examine them, as it were," Norton addressed an imaginary audience, "knowing he was a connoisseur of jewels. Stick around. Stick around. This guy is good!"

"You know, honestly, I couldn't find a flaw in them, so I take the opportunity—"

"You've got the loot, and you'll take nothing more. Honest, Vernie, do you mean to tell me you took money for acting? I knew you was a crook, but, Jesus! fellow, I didn't t'ink you was as low down as that. Honest, Vernie, I didn't."

"My good man—" Bonds made an assumption of dignity.

"You flat-footed, tenth-rate ham!" Norton railed at him. He heard the maid conducting some one along the corridor and he whipped the gun out. "Put up your hands, you son of a street-sweeper. Camera!"

But Norton was very serious and dignified when the officer entered—a six-foot two County Clare man, with blue eyes and black hair. The policeman took one look at the open safe and at Bonds with his upraised hands and his white face.

"I think you will find a necklace of Mrs. Keogh's and some diamond and other rings in his left-hand trousers-pocket. I found him in front of the open safe. Keep up your hands, you!"

"I've got them." The officer nodded. He laid his hands on Bonds's shoulder. "You'll come along with me, my boy-o!"

"Mrs. Keogh will explain—" Bonds was hysterical.

"Mrs. Keogh is dead!" said Norton, slowly.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

Bonds could say nothing. There seemed something the matter with his throat. His face was a ghastly white. Perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"I suppose he found the key of the safe somewhere," Norton told the policeman, "and before the poor lady's body was cold he tried to steal her jewels. And the worst of it was she had been so good to him. He was a sort of parasite on her. My name is Norton." He gave the policeman a card. "I am a close friend of the district attorney's."

"All right, Mr. Norton," the policeman said. "More power to you, sir. You caught a bad one. It'll be the sorry day for this bird when he robbed a dead woman of her jewels in this part of the country. Put out your paws!" He snapped home the handcuffs.

"I am an English gentleman." Bonds was savage as a trapped rat. "Take your hands off me, you filthy Irish Mick!"

"You can keep that talk for Magistrate O'Brien." The big officer smiled dangerously. "'Tis he will appreciate it."

"I am a famous motion-picture artist—"

"Faith, and you may be that same," the officer grinned with a touch of malice, "but your occupation will be different for the next ten years. Come on, now; you make me sick the way you do be talking. Good-by, Mr. Norton. My congratulations to you, sir. You acted fine. You did that."

"It was a privilege." Norton smiled urbanely. "A privilege and a pleasure."

CHAPTER XXIV

I

CAMPBELL had caught Derith and Bee Peabody and d'Epernay Vallon at Bishop's, after having called at three cabarets. He saw them at a table on the line bordering the dancing-floor; Bee Peabody looking bored, though probably she wasn't, alternately sipping a white mint and drawing deep breaths of a cigarette, dark-haired, poised, something like the hard-faced models Mr. Howard Chandler Christy draws from; d'Epernay Vallon, swarthy, saturnine, watched the care-free dancers with an air of kindly and approving patronage—it was good to mingle with the people at times—they were very amusing; and this evening, also, he was feeling in an exalted humor. He had arranged to leave Bee Peabody home first, and then, escorting Derith to her aunt Edith's, he would ask her to accept his rank and title and himself with them. He had read her face rightly for days, and he knew she felt what was coming, and she would accept shyly—at least she would have done that yesterday, and this morning, before Charity de la Ferté Voreux had spoken to her, but of what the duchess had told her he was ignorant.

Had he been in love with her he would have felt intuitively that she had come to some decision, else

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

she would not now be devoting her full attention to the dancers on the floor, watching the wine merchants gyrating with lesser actresses, and young naval men enjoying their flash of popularity, their arms about dark-eyed models. Had he known other than venal women, to whom the intimacy of men is as casual as meals, he would have sensed that, were the decision favorable to his suit, she would not have been so calm and imperturbed.

He watched her, marveling in her strange, fluid beauty, her lips half open like a flower, and her dark eyes dilated with sympathy. She saw romance and happiness on the floor in front of her, while d'Epernay Vallon saw only the amours of the *bourgeoisie*, as commonplace and as sordid as the love-making of barn-yard fowl; and Bee Peabody, New York-broken, saw only the barter and exchange of casual passion and mean intrigue. Suddenly the French nobleman saw Derith's face grow white and her body start with surprise.

"Angus!" she said, and clutched Bee Peabody's hand.

Straight toward their table he came, across the dancing-floor, his face bronzed and his shoulders terrific as a ship with set sails. The dancers made way for him, and those who didn't were thrown aside as they knocked up against him, as though they had struck a rock. It was not courtesy on Angus's part. It was just that he started out in a straight line with the one idea of getting to that table. Escorts of women turned angrily and, seeing that compact mass moving forward, contented themselves with mutterings instead of high words

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

and possible blows. And d'Epernay Vallon, as Angus came, was filled with an unreasoning and terrible hatred of the man.

Angus nodded to Bee Peabody, whom he knew in Shane Butler's day, and, ignoring d'Epernay Vallon, he drew a chair up beside Derith and sat down. He took her hand, and her throat fluttered as he did it. She was still dazed. He was, to her, as one who had come back from the dead, her old friend Angus of happy days, and there was a new feeling in her heart that she had not known then, a tremor in her bosom as he took her hands.

"I want you to come home, Derry," he said. "Our men in New River have been rioting this afternoon, and there are machine-guns mounted on the roofs."

She was terrified for them. Her heart jumped. He just held her hands.

"It will be all right, Derry, once we get home."

"Mr. Campbell manages the Keogh shipyards," Bee Peabody explained to the count. He turned to Campbell, his eyebrows raised. There was inexplicable hatred in his heart.

"If you are Miss Keogh's servant," he observed, venomously, "you can take care of this matter yourself, if you are a capable man. Surely it is not Miss Keogh's plan to meddle in a matter of rioters. And, moreover, my good man, Miss Keogh has other plans."

"I am not Miss Keogh's servant." Angus leaned forward to the count. He dropped his voice. "And what's more, I'll trouble you to mind your own God-damned business. I'll mind Miss Keogh's." His

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

light-blue eyes glinted terribly out of the mask of bronze, meeting the Frenchman's, and for the first time in his life d'Epernay Vallon knew what it was to be afraid of another man. And it wasn't a pleasant feeling. It was like being beaten deservedly with whips.

"Does she have to go, Scotty?" Bee asked.

"She's got to go, and she goes to-night. I've got tickets and berths for the Boston express. I'll run her up to her aunt, and she can change there. She's got an hour. Come, Derry."

She was white and shaken. She had spoken no word yet. "I thought you had gone back on me," she murmured, huskily.

"I go back on you?" Campbell laughed. "Never in this life or the next!"

She stood up at that, and he with her, and d'Epernay Vallon was surprised to see he topped her by several inches—so broad he was he had seemed a small man. He was bronzed and tanned and radiant, like a god of the sea, and she, shy and soft and very lissome, was like a divinity of the soft green woods that border the great waters. He felt suddenly very alien to this Celtic twain. Theirs was life, untrammeled and wind-swept and beautiful, while he was barred from all that by a wall of artifice. His title was no more than a cloak of satin and gold covering a hunchback, before their shining nudity. He felt humbled. And into the eyes of Bee Peabody, poor girl! pathetic envy crept. Her life with Schuyler was all but over, and no more, she felt with a woman's intuition, would true love come to her on blessed, healing wings.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Take me away, Angus." Derith gripped his hand with great strength. "Take me away quickly. I'm afraid I'm going to cry!"

II

In the taxi on the way to Edith Johnson's she did cry, and cry fully and very beautifully, as some traveler who had braved the hazards of a forest of wolves might cry with relief and comfort on reaching a walled hostelry. All the pain and disappointment of life, and its ugliness, vanished with her dewy tears, as she nestled unconsciously into his arms. "It is good for me to be here," her heart cried, surprisedly. It was as though she were a tired swimmer in traitorous water, and had at last reached firm and lovely land. "Why didn't I know of this before?" And she buried her cheek in his coat.

He held her there very gently, all the world's loveliness in his arms, and he had the same feeling he had had when once he held blown apple-blossoms in his sinewy palm, and experienced when he had returned to its nest a fallen fledgling—inexpressible softness and a beating heart. And then, silently, shyly, trustfully, she raised her head, her eyes shining in her dewy face. And he kissed the lovely mouth.

III

At Edith Johnson's they could hardly tear themselves away from each other, but she had to change her dress, and while she was gone Edith packed for

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

her, hurrying her Savoyard maid to get a little supper ready. Edith was happy.

"I knew it would come out right." She laid her hand on Angus's shoulder. "I prayed for it. I prayed hard."

She had heard, somehow, probably from Police Headquarters, of the accident on the Post Road.

"Shall I tell her, or will you?"

"I will tell her," Angus said.

Derith came into the little sitting-room, her eyes shining and happiness radiating from her face, like the gentle light of stars.

"Derry, my dear." He stopped her. "Jean, John's wife, was killed in an automobile accident to-night."

She stood still, her face white, the knuckles of her right hand pressed against her mouth.

"She had been out joy-riding with a man," Angus went on.

"Oh, Angus, it will kill John!" she moaned. "It will kill him—he loved that girl!"

He put his arms around her gently.

"Al Norton went up to Braeburn for him, and will catch him to-night, before he gets any news. He's going to bring John down to New York somewhere to-morrow night, and John will wake up at sea, on a five-masted schooner, bound for Montevideo. The skipper is Jorn Pederson, who was once your father's cabin-boy, and he'll tell him little by little. And John will be all right. And he'll come back to us, Derry, with a new grip on life. The sea will wash all bitterness out of him and heal him with clean salt winds—" For the first time the

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

gift of speech was vouchsafed to him, as though there had appeared to him a cloven tongue as of fire, and it sat upon him. "Out there, on the endless waters, he will see everything in true perspective, my dear one, and Jean Keogh will be of less account than a dolphin or a gull—"

"You always said, 'Our mother, the sea.'" Derith understood him suddenly. The kissing of their mouths had already mystically fused their bodies, it seemed, and there was no barrier between them, spirit understanding spirit with a paucity of words.

CHAPTER XXV

I

TREVELYAN hesitated a moment before accepting the hazard of going to the Keogh household that morning. What did Derith Keogh want with him? Was she about to give in to the workers? Probably. That didn't suit him at all. The strike at New River had taken on more than a theoretical value. In imitation, as sheep follow a bell-wether, the workers of the Brass City of Waterbury had struck, demanding all but impossible concessions. At Lawrence there was still trouble. The silver-workers at Meriden had gone out, and hourly he was expecting work to stop in the Fall River mills. All through the country agitators were dripping unrest like subtle poison, and workers were going to and fro talking in angry whispers.

"I'd better tell her straight," he decided, "to realize what she can and leave the country."

New River was seething with anger. There still remained in the works the unimportant sort of laborers, men whose jobs were to screw on electric-light bulbs in the cabins and state-rooms and to fix plumbing—the helotry of labor. Only yesterday a few harridans of the strike had upbraided them bitterly as they left the works, and a policeman

'THE STRANGERS' BANQUET.'

interfering had had his face torn with finger-nails. On his attempting an arrest a volley of stones had hurtled about him. And then suddenly there had been hell loose, a baton charge, a spitting of revolvers. Over a hundred arrests had been made. And to-day there were machine-guns on the roofs, and the militia was being hurried here. Trevelyan smiled.

That would be rather a bad move, he thought to himself. The militia was not what it had been, a force ready to act as a capitalist state government directed. In five, six, seven, eight years the artisan had come to a truer valuation of his standing in economics. He knew that whereas capital could not stand without labor, labor could without capital. It had done so in ancient ages, and could do so still. In the event of a cataclysm he could return to the primitive state when the artisan did a day's work for a few days' food, and exchanged a set of household furniture for the toil of the shepherd and the weaver and the tailor. Capital might laugh and talk of impossibilities. The artisan was getting rather tired of capital's airs and bullyings and arrogance. Very well, let's have a show-down. All the weapon capital had was money, but the artisan had a clever Russian weapon called the soviet which he could use did occasion arise. A-ha! Capital didn't like that! And the artisan was at least fifty per cent. of the militia. He was not so ready to fire on his fellow-workers as capital would like to believe.

Yes, if there were direct recourse to arms, Trevelyan smiled grimly, the great industrial interests would be in a rather dangerous place. A call for

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

army munitions had trained hundreds of thousands of foreigners in the mysteries of explosives, Slavs, Scandinavians, Latins, men imbued with new Russian doctrines and ancient Ferrer beliefs. Capital had brought them in to discipline the American working-man, and now it had them on its hands, red-eyed, slaver-mouthed, armed with torches. And a national conscription act had trained them to the usage of arms—not only they, but a million men of the gutter and the underworld, irresponsible, greedy men whose dream was loot and rapine, and there was only one thing that could lash them into organized revolt, and only one thing could hold them back, and that was his, Trevelyan's, marvelous oratory and flaming presence. He, the Messiah of Sabotage, could make them frenzied, like the Magic Horn of Irish legend that sent kings berserk into battle, or calm them, like the Bell-branch of the Druids, that lulled men into unhuman sleep.

"I will tell her how things are," he decided again, "and make her leave the country. She shall not be engulfed in the coming days."

II

He had expected to see her broken, a pleading figure, who would accept what he said as a dethroned queen might listen without force to a leader of the people, wondering only what disposition was to be made of her. He had expected, somehow, to find a house of grief, but as he came up the path the windows were open and the summer breeze swept through it. The great living-room was full of light

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

and flowers. The maid ushered him in, without an instant's waiting, and for a full moment he stood there astonished, for he had never expected to see Angus Campbell near this place again, and yet here he was, hard-jawed, steady as a rock, and Derith Keogh was speaking to him, her hands on his, her forehead inclined to his sinewy shoulders. For an instant Trevelyan stood looking at them, his soft hat crushed in his right hand, his strong prophet's face rising like a chiseling of Rodin's above the flannel shirt and rough suit he wore. There shot into his heart a strange envy, not of Angus Campbell, but of both for the thing he knew was between them, a treasure that he felt would never be his.

She turned toward him without embarrassment, walking forward to meet him.

"Mr. Trevelyan, is this true what Angus Campbell tells me: that you are determined to ruin our shipyards?"

"I'm afraid they must go."

"Why must you do this thing?"

She was looking at him straight, and he studied her there with her proud, steadfast gaze, her righteous eyes, her determined chin. There would be no use telling her that her structure must go in the interest of all. With her strange instinct she would know that this was false philosophy, and before her clear eyes he could not confess his outrageous hatred of everything. He was ashamed. For the first time in his life he was ashamed.

"I can't believe it," she said, succinctly. "Though Angus says so, and you say so yourself, still I can't

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

believe it." She went over to the window-seat and sat there for an instant. "My father, Shane Butler Keogh, was a just and kind man. These people were always in his heart. These people, Mr. Trevelyan, were always in mine. Everything I did for them was a trying to make things easy." She raised her hand and looked at him in a puzzled way. "There was never a fight between me and them. I gave them those reforms because I thought their lives would be less poverty-stricken, and they could share in my prosperity. I was never afraid of them." Her eyes flashed. "I am afraid of nothing when I am in the right. I chose to err on the side of generosity. And when I found that I was spoiling them, doing wrong, I stopped. That is all."

Trevelyan's eyes were wandering about the room, resting here and there, on Derith, sitting on the window-seat, a slim girl in a gingham dress, who melted into the simple beauty of the room, where there was nothing that spoke of spent wealth, but all was simply right. Its openness, its light, its pictures, its bulky fireplace, and the girl herself, brought back to him in a poignant thrust where his heart was, the white monastery with its white brethren, its garden with the scarlet geraniums and white roses, its stone seat beneath the vine-covered walls, past which monks strode reading their breviaries and telling their beads, and above it all, on the chapel roof, the great iron cross shedding a peace that passeth all understanding. There life had been thought out by him in terms of mysticism and beauty, and here it was lived. And here, too, would the decree of the God he had worshiped—a

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

merciful, majestic, white Being in His leafy, moonlit, passionate world—be carried out into proud generations by this warm and lovely girl, and the man who stood in strong silence by her, Angus Campbell, whose soul and mind were steady as a rock. He would never be of the great tortured ones, rocking to and fro in the night hours, abhorred by sleep, waiting with aching head and gnashing teeth until the dawn break. . . . An equable and strong mate for her after the design of God.

"There is one thing you can count on." Campbell spoke for the first time. "We have done our best to act rightly. And we are not now going to give in. We go down fighting, colors flying and nailed."

Trevelyan nodded. That was but right. There spoke the man he had seen in Angus the night he came armed and ready to kill. He felt Derith's hand on his sleeve.

"What is wrong, Mr. Trevelyan? Surely whatever you suffer is no reason for making other people suffer." She had divined his terrible driving force, and he sensed that she was filled with pity for him. "Surely you can stop it and surely you will. When I think of what it means, people in hunger, men angry and hurt, and women eating their hearts out." She broke down, her head bowed, her fingers seeking her handkerchief. "The cold homes and the little children in their cribs. . . ."

He took one more look about the room and nodded to Angus.

"Come on, Campbell," he said. "Let's go out and stop this thing."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

There was no look of triumph on Angus's face, nor look of gratitude, either, for he and Derith were receiving nothing but their due. Impassive, self-contained, he walked beside Trevelyan, and so Trevelyan would have it.

III

In front of the shipyards the long, broad street was packed with darkly clothed men and a sprinkling of women, and the side-streets, too, were filled. The machine-guns had disappeared, at Angus's request, and the police were absent. On the temporary platform of a few stanch tables Trevelyan had mounted alone. The crowd cleared a place in front of this, and Angus leaned against the tables. In the forefront of the strikers was Jim Dolan, the agitator, with a mixture of shock and hatred on his face, and his hands in his pockets. Trevelyan raised his open palm. There was terrific silence.

"Citizens," he began; "my people." He paused. "I have just come from Miss Derith Keogh. And Miss Keogh asks you to go back to work. When I left Miss Keogh," his ringing voice had taken on hypnotic accents of tenderness, very soothing, "Miss Keogh's handkerchief was to her eyes. And she spoke of men hungering, and women eating their hearts out, and of cold homes and little children in their cribs. It was as though her breast had been cloven with a knife and I saw her heart beating. These are easy things to talk of, citizens, and shallow men speak sneeringly of sentiment, reckoning as cheap things that they cannot weigh, for they have

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

not the scales of heart or spirit. To Miss Keogh these things are terrible as ghosts and actual as stones.

"I've been all around this land, north and northwest, west and south and east, and never before have I seen an employer weep. They knew that men hungered and women feared, and that homes were cold, and children's cribs were sold from beneath their little bodies. They knew that, and they reckoned on it, saying: 'A little hunger, a little cold, many tears, and suffering children, and the strikers will say, as said rebelling Israel in the wilderness, "Surely, Egypt was better!"' These men are the cause of war.

"War, citizens, is no man's portion. There is a promise unto a chosen people that a day should come when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together. And as Israel dreamed of that day in their struggle with their God, so did leaders of the people dream of it in the conflict of capital."

He had them completely under his control; the hypnotic voice, the swaying figure, the moving hands, all held them. The tense look had passed from their eyes and they were relaxed, amenable to suggestion—all but one man. Dolan's features, on the edge of the sea of faces, showed like an ugly reef.

"With the oppressors of the people, then, war to the knife! Demand shed blood for spent blood. Return for their cunning Christianity the terrible Hebrew righteousness. Pharaoh would not give straw for bricks, but demanded that his pyramids

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

be raised, howsoever. And righteous Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. So it is written to be a record unto this day.

"There was another king, Solomon, Master of Masons, and there labored for him threescore and ten thousand that bore burdens and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains besides the chief of his officers. And there was no friction there nor any trouble. There was victual, it is recorded, for all that came unto King Solomon's table, every man in his mouth; they lacked nothing. For Solomon had understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand is on the seashore." He paused and looked over them.

"I wish, citizens," he said, simply, "that I had known Shane Butler Keogh, and known his daughter Derith Keogh better before I came here. I would have known that there was peace between you. And I would not have come here with words to have set you one against the other; to lead you on, an embattled army, demanding privileges that were not unlike the booty of a surrendered city. I saw only a factory, and I thought that in this place, as in every other place, was being waged the eternal traditional war.

"I did not know, citizens, that there was among you many an old gaffer pensioned by Shane Butler Keogh, many a young man whom Angus Campbell had helped out of trouble, many a young woman whom Derith Keogh had visited in sickness. Else I should not have come among you bearing the great unrest, demanding rights for you who had friendship, and guaranties for you who had protection."

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

He was as though accusing them now, and the great audience in front of him, overflowing the street, shuffled embarrassedly. As he put it now, it seemed to them that they had been ungrateful dogs, and they forgot in their shame that it was Trevelyan who, with winged words, had sped them onward to ignorant disobedience, as the serpent which was more subtle than any beast of the field lured the woman into plundering the tree.

"Citizens, and my people"—his hands went out in sincerity—"I want you to go back to Miss Keogh as you were before I came. Let there be war in other places, but between you and her let there be peace and understanding. Let there be one place where, when capitalists grovel under the red terror, they can look to, saying, 'If mine were so, all would be right with me.' And whether charity visits them or not, they must do as your pattern denotes or pass the ordeal of the bomb and the torch and the swinging noose at the lamp-post. Go back. You have a great opportunity and a great call. Citizens and my people, go back."

Through the crowded streets there was discussion now, quick, crackling. Except for the I. W. W.'s scattered here and there and the labor lieutenants, the crowd seemed to be unanimous in accepting Trevelyan's command. Here and there, though, there was a scuffle, and the vast mass surged with the fighting men. But a cheer rose somewhere and was taken up by a half-dozen voices, and then by a hundred, and a thousand joined in, and then more, until it seemed as if the ground beneath quivered in tune with the rhythmical volume, and as

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

though the houses on either side would tremble and fall. The circle near about was a sea of enthusiastic faces, but for one, and that was Dolan's, now suppressed to blackness, as an epileptic's in an attack of his malady, with blind and hideous rage. Trevelyan raised his hand, and again there was silence.

"From this day, among a million men my name will be a thing to curse at . . ."

"By God it will!" Campbell heard Dolan muttering. He was tugging at his hip-pocket.

". . . but I have done right, and I do not care. They will say I have been bought, as men of this type always do. And though one knows one has done right, yet it is a cold reward in a lonely world. Therefore I want to carry something away with me," his voice was strangely sweet and pathetic, "to solace me in the cold days. Men, I want your forgiveness for having led you astray. Wives, I want yours for having led your husbands—"

"Look out!" Campbell warned.

He saw the flash and heard the minute thunder of Dolan's gun, and it seemed to him also he could hear the dull percussion as the bullets struck Trevelyan's body.

"It's nothing," Trevelyan said. "And I want your children . . ."

He sank at the knees and keeled backward as Angus sprang up to catch him.

"Listen, there's a gun in my hip-pocket," Trevelyan was muttering, painfully. "Take it and kill Dolan. Kill him! Kill Dolan for me!"

Angus swung with it in his hand toward the mob. He suddenly turned away.

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

"Too late. The men are doing it."

"Good!"

The crowd surged toward them. Campbell turned to them savagely.

"Get back! God damn you! Get back! Give the man a bit of room to die."

Trevelyan was murmuring something, with closed eyes and head bent forward. "*Domine, non sum dignus!*"—"I am not worthy, Lord!" Campbell caught. And suddenly on the man's face there was sweet dignity. Campbell laid the head down gently; stood up; straightened his collar and tie. . . .

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was all but over, the Indian summer, Derith told herself. In her father's garden the trees had turned to splendid yellows and browns and reds, like exotic jewelry, and beneath her feet the grass was short and brownish, and it and the trees and the yellow beehives by the wall blended into a symphony of autumn that some old and philosophic painter would have loved, being more in his mood than the riot and passion of summer. Ivy twined about the pillar of the sun-dial, and the points and face of it, beneath her elbow, were covered with a fine film of verdigris, like lapis lazuli. It, too, seemed to experience the beauty of the fleeting season, voicing its eternal, selfish cry, *Eheu, fugaces anni!* forgetful that all would come again.

It was all so right, she felt. First there was the modesty of spring with its soft winds like the plucked notes of a harper's melody, and then came passionate summer, a riot of flowers and purple lightning and sparkling seas. Bronzed, dignified autumn followed, with the honking of the barnacle-geese, and the cunning jack-snipe, a season of calm experience, and later would come winter, with the snap of frost, the red of holly-berries, and the soft white snow, and all slept peacefully until the cuckoo called, as the baby beneath her heart was sleeping—

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

a season when old men sat by the fire, seeing in the glowing red of it dim, lovely faces, and letting their pipes go out, remembering bashfulness and the flowering April meads. . . .

She tried to rouse herself to go inside, for dinner was soon to come, and to-night there would be Al Norton there, and her brother John. Al would be late, she remembered. He had gone to a coursing-match in the country somewhere—he was the only one the men would trust to unleash the hounds. John was in the house, bronzed after his four months' voyage, and a sudden strength and manliness in him. She had been afraid at first that morning when he came, he had seemed rigid and chilled like steel. Angus had drawn her aside when she spoke of it to him.

“Leave him alone.”

She had done as Angus said, and in the afternoon she had caught sight of him in the garden, shooting golf-balls in the air with a mashie niblick over the sun-dial, replacing divots carefully and patting them down with his hand, and suddenly his voice had broken into one of her father's songs:

“Tis my grief that Patrick Loughlin is not Earl in Irrul still,
And that Brian Duff no longer rules as lord upon the hill,
And that Colonel Hugh O'Grady should be lying dead and low,
And I am sailing swiftly from the County of Mayo.”

She knew then he was happy.

All was so right she felt a little like crying over it. The twilight was creeping up out of the east, and the garden seemed filled with the strong and tender Celtic divinities, and she felt like praying to them in

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

thankfulness. All her "care," as she remembered her father's word, was right and rightfully happy. John, now. And last night Al Norton had surprised them by throwing a sheaf of manuscript on the table.

"What do you t'ink o' dose?"

She had looked at them casually, opened her eyes, and read until the tears glistened in them, the swinging verse of a poet stronger than the Norton of the Greek-medal days, everything from the pathetic minor of the "Ballads of Broadway"—the "Ballad of Diamond Jim," she had frankly cried over that—to the crashing epic of "The Old Age of Porfirio Diaz."

"I was sitting pretty all the time, Derry." Al had laughed at the self-accusation in her eyes. "You can tell them all from me—I was sitting on the world."

She was crying happily in the dusk and thanking her gods. Everything was right. John would go down to the waters all his days in ships—so he had said, and that was the life for him. And Al Norton would progress in his art, challenging Villon and Chaucer and Yeats—a strange poet, sitting at the ringside of prize-fights, and unleashing greyhounds in coursing-matches, and boasting of the most magnificent thirst since the Chinese bard, Li Po, who was called the Drinker of Wine. The men at the works were contented and happy under her husband's firm and just and gentle hand.

She gave a little start, for the baby beneath her breast was stirring, and then she smiled. To him and his brothers there would be handed on a fine tradition that working-men would trust more than

THE STRANGERS' BANQUET

character. John could teach him and them fearlessness, and Al Norton chivalry, and he would have his grandfather's and his father's firm and generous hand. And for him there would be great loyalty, and he would feel responsibility to his men, to his ideals, to his country. . . . So to her promised the High, Invisible One in the garden.

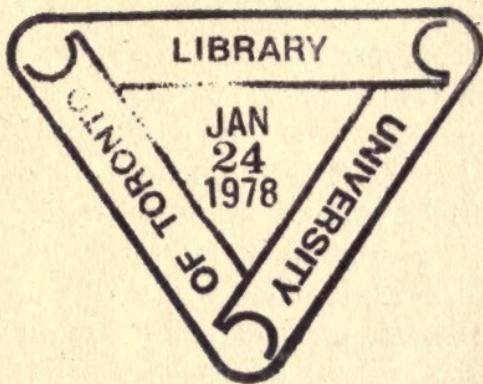
And she would see them grow under her, an issue of men worthy of their land, a living covenant of warm right and generous justice for the poor. They would be men when the time came for her and Angus to set sail over the sunset waters to the green lawn of the fiddlers, where the blind pipers played under the apple-trees, reel and hornpipe and *rinnce fada*, and kings' daughters danced to the rippling strains; while white hounds lay gracefully in the shadows and a multitude of birds sang. . . .

The ship's bell within gave the first signal for dinner, and she heard her husband call, "Derith! Derry!" with that faint note of anxiety in his voice she loved—it was as though he were always afraid of losing her. He came swiftly toward her through the twilight.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked, gently.

She looked at him with her gray eyes brimming happy tenderness. "I am waiting until the spring comes, Angus." She was thinking of his baby under her heart. "Until the spring comes, Angus, and the green on the bough. . . ."

THE END OF
THE STRANGERS' BANQUET



PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

PR
6003
Y43S8

Byrne, Donn
The strangers' banquet

